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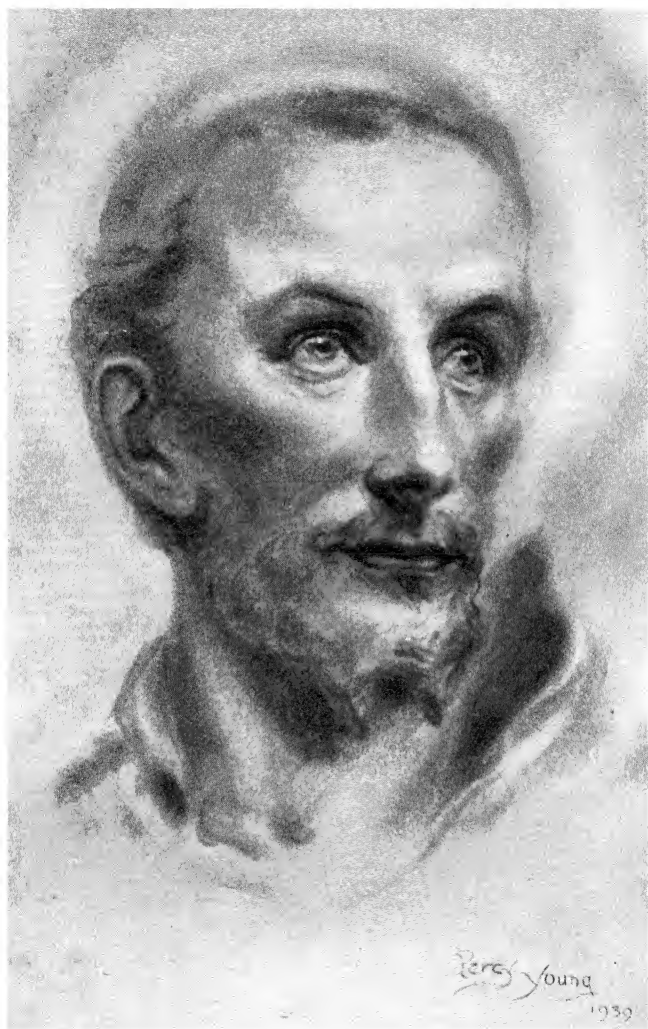
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**SAINT  
FRANCIS OF ASSISI  
AND HIS  
LIVING MESSAGE FOR TO-DAY**

*By*  
**RICHARD WHITWELL**

*"The spirit of Francis speaks to our age as to his own: the religious and social problems are not separate, they are the same; they are not two, they are one."*

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## INTRODUCTION

**T**HERE is a modern appeal in the message of St. Francis, though seven hundred years separate his day from ours. It is evident in the interest that attaches to him at the present time. The records have been well sifted, the old legend retold and popularised. The most lovable of the saints has been presented to us. But even yet the man we do not fully know.

Some have written upon him in the aspect of social reformer; others as saint and as mystic. As a result of much earnest and devoted enquiry Francis at length emerges from the mists of time, not merely as saint, not merely as social reformer, but as one of those pivotal souls of history in whom was unified the social and spiritual consciousness. From an inner gracious baptism he caught something of the whole Gospel of Jesus, and in a way so original that he was lifted above all sectarianism. In him the poet and the prophet blended; the fervour of his spirit was poised in a rich imaginative vision.

Our endeavour in the present study is to portray the life of Francis more from the subjective side. Imaginatively yet reverently would we enter the inner sanctuary with him. Fain would we feel the kindling emotion of that living communion which was his. Then indeed may we catch the spirit of his message, applicable to our time no less than to his own; find in it a word of rich meaning bearing upon our present-day problems in no uncertain manner.

His was a gracious life. He loved all people; he thought meanly of none. While his love went out unto all, we read that "his very bowels yearned over the poor." For to him Christ, in a special way, was represented in the poor.

It was no mere other-world salvation that he preached, even if that was comprehended in his message. It was the kingdom

of God on earth. He was in love with the thought. In his eager vision he saw the people thronging from every country to join the new Brotherhood. If everyone saw and felt as he saw and felt, they could not help but come.

The brothers were to render a full service freely. The return would follow, as richly promised, from the hand of God. "Fear not, little flock," he would say, repeating the words of Jesus, "for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." There was to be, as far as possible, a mutual give and take. They were to hold no possessions; for the holding of good, making it one's own, would stem the holy stream of blessing. As the health of the body consists in the free passage of the life-stream throughout its every part, without congestion, even so is it with society. The flow of good should nowhere be congested.

In these terms did Francis conceive the ideal democracy. His vision is summed up and personified in one word—Lady Poverty, who was rich beyond all that wealth can bring. For her companionship became the immediacy of the Presence of God. His non-possession would be his richest possession. It is God's entrance-gate. God cannot be ours while we hold to a lesser good.

Here at length was scope for his chivalry; for his boyhood ideal had remained with him. Yet no longer a play-acting, but a chivalry in deed and in truth, a knight errantry for the kingdom of God! Here was a supreme object worthy of his quest, which with ardour he pressed to achieve, and win for his Lady the kingdom of which she had so long been deprived.

His fealty to Lady Poverty meant a stepping right out of the ordinary ways of life, with its buying and selling methods, its standards of profit and loss. It implied a life of service, eager service, not for gain, but for Love's sake. Love was the motive, love to God, and love to man. And with it joy comes surging in. There is an infectious gaiety about it all. A great freedom is felt, which comes from such a new and

fresh outlook. "Who can express the charity, patience, humility and obedience, and the fraternal merriment among the brethren at that time," we read.

A fragment of an old letter written by Francis still remains: "I beg of you all," he writes, "to persevere always in this most holy life and poverty, and to take good care never to depart from it."

When necessity arose, the brothers were privileged to undertake what was regarded as the most sacred action of all, to carry round the alms-box. And in return for what was freely given, their privilege was to convey, by simple word, the heavenly blessing. For it was the love of God they gave, "priceless above rubies," Francis said. Therefore it was with burning hearts they did this work, treading as it were on sacred ground. "Give an alms," the early Franciscan would eagerly say, not because of, but *in return* "for the love of God."

The deeper meaning of his thought is that his fellows should feel that they are receiving all their good direct from God, howsoever it may come to them, realising it as God's return for their glad and eager service in His work. And in his thought every work pursued without desire of gain is work for God, whether it is household duty, or manual work, no less than the work of ministry.

In some of the stories which have come down to us we seem to catch the very spirit of St. Francis. Love is pouring from his heart. Life glows as with new and fresh meaning. From heaven and earth, the flowers of the field, the birds of the air and every living thing, kindred voices are speaking unto him. And all voices blend into one Voice, and it is the voice of Love. All tells of a Presence so near and wonderful, giving of Its meaning to all that lives. Life in its every way, in its every transaction becomes illumined in that Love-light. And so it is redeemed from drabness, and becomes a joyful thing.

My indebtedness is due to the several helpful translations of the early writings, and in especial to Paul Sabatier's fine research work in this field. And I warmly acknowledge the courtesy of the publishers\* of the English translation of his *Life of St. Francis* for their permission in quoting from this book.

R.W.

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*“For what are the servants of the Lord, but His minstrels, who should raise the hearts of men and move them to spiritual joy.”*

—MIRROR OF PERFECTION.

# SAINT FRANCIS OF ASSISI

## CHAPTER I

### EARLY DAYS AND INTUITIONS

**I**T must, to the merely casual observer, seem strange that in this twentieth century, sky-crowned as it is with scientific achievement, there should be a wistful turning back to a period of comparative darkness for a clue of guidance for today. The reason perhaps is not far to seek. It is in the growing consciousness of a present spiritual and social, moral and economic impasse, and a wonderment mounting to belief whether a solution then offered, and in a measure applied by that medieval age, would not prove the sufficing fulfilment and answer to the present even greater need.

“I give you the end of a golden string:  
Only wind it into a ball,  
It will lead you in at Heaven’s gate  
Built in Jerusalem’s wall.”

We have travelled far from the respectable Victorian age and its superior contempt for those times. That they were dark we need not deny. It made a strong background to the wonderful thing that transpired.

There were stars visible from the heavens, and one appeared of the first magnitude, from which there shone light upon the way, and which, glowing down the ages, shines doubly clear today by reason of our perhaps greater darkness. Was it not said, “If the light that is in thee be darkness, then how great is that darkness.”

Alas, beneath our outward show, there is a heart sick, weary and heavy-laden. The spirit of complacency that led the nations to the precipice of the Great War of 1914-18 died amid the carnage. That tragic event and its dread aftermath served but to reveal a moral and spiritual anarchy. At the issue our wise leaders failed, and (but here let us draw a veil of tears) the churches. The Master, whose first and final word was forgiveness, was denied.

Man's intellect, efficient even to the point of diabolic genius in devising means of destruction, stands helpless before the spectacle of the shipwreck of our modern civilisation. It is paralysed at sight of the vast reconstruction that the new days demand. Schemes of social betterment are being planned and carried out before our eyes that in the testing are found wanting. At the same time suspicions and misunderstandings still weave their tapestries of darkness between the nations. And so the old vicious circle continues.

What man requires is a new heart. He wants eyes that see truly. The age cries out for spiritual rather than social treatment. The madonna of spiritual religion carries in her arms the babe of the new society.

Our western world has trodden an unwise and errant path as from Jerusalem to Jericho. The human heart, waylaid and sore-stricken amid the darkness, bereft of good, is fainting on the cold, dank earth. At this season of direst need, priest and Levite (shall we say, other-world religion?) pass by on the other side. May it be "there cometh also a good Samaritan" whose outer garment is that of the poverillo of Assisi, but whose inner radiance is Christ, bearing a cruse of healing to pour upon those naked and bleeding social and spiritual wounds?

It is related that Pope Innocent III near the end of his long life dreamed a strange dream. He saw the Church of the Lateran slipping its foundations and in danger of collapsing, when a poor and unpretentious man stood against it

and propped it up. That poor man was Francis of Assisi, the subject of our study, and in actual fact it might be said of him that he applied a balsam to the social sore no less than to the spiritual wound.

Seven hundred years separate his age from our own, but the two periods afford a curious comparison. The early chronicles are full of mourning, for there was a blatant materialism everywhere. "Christ and his saints, they are asleep," mourns one. "Joy has forsaken the world," complains another. A dark gloom lay heavy over the nations. Men were prone to violence at the slightest pretext. Religion seemed drowned in superstition. Faith lay gasping for want of the living breath. There was profound unrest in the whole of the western world. It is a picture dark and sad enough in all conscience.

Francis came and went. There was a change. Joy and light were born anew into the world. It was a stream that, pulsing through his deep spiritual experience, spread wide, and, increasing as it went, baptised the new age in its gladness. His advent was, Bonaventura does not hesitate to say, "as the very angel of the sun-rising."

It is asserted that the high genius of Dante could not have been had not Francis been before him. We might add, neither could the sweet carol of the English Chaucer. Yet with even more certitude could it be said that the great mystic movement represented by such illumined spirits as Eckhart, John Tauler, Ruysbroek, Thomas A'Kempis, and the saintly author of the *Theologia Germanica* had its birth in the experience of Francis of Assisi.

The few incidents that we know of the early life of Francis are not exactly what we would read back from his later career. Perhaps for that reason they bear the greater evidence of substantial accuracy. Of a necessity much must have had origin in words that he himself let drop, by no means sparing in his own self-criticism. Much also is the result of

a well-attested and sifted witness, gathered in Assisi after his death, from those who knew him in his early days. Even then we cannot fail to see how near the soul was to the surface of his nature. Is it not evident in the eager spirit in which he did things? Is it not all but visible in those sudden uprushes of shame or indignation or enthusiasm that so characterised him? And do we not discern it even more clearly in that constant awareness of his of some big meaning attaching to his life?

Destiny hovered about him from his very childhood; but that we might say of any sensitive spirit, as for instance the poet Blake or Shelley. Francis also was poet to his very finger-tips, but more, for his nature demanded the vivid touching of experience. Not content merely to dream, he wrought to bring his vision to a present point and purpose. But his new life began with a stress of experience that drew forth the swift and clear challenge of his soul.

Francis was born in Assisi in the springtime probably of the year 1182. He was the first child of Peter Bernardoni, a travelling master-merchant of that city. Bernardoni's business, as a trader in cloth, led him among the nobility of Provence. The name, Francis, he gave to his son, superseding the baptismal name of John given in his absence, indicated his love of France and things French, a love afterwards shared in no small measure by his son. In addition to the ordinary education, simple enough, the boy received especial training in the French tongue, till he became familiar with it as with his own. He inherited his father's love of music with a zest for those songs of chivalry which made Provence at that time "a very nest of singing birds." On the other hand, the influence of his mother, Pica, bred in him that gentle courtesy so conspicuous in his later life.

A master-merchant in those days had a high social footing, and the child of Bernardoni found many of his playmates among the children of the nobility of Assisi. This

companionship was maintained as he grew up, being fostered by the lavish spending of money, a spendthriftiness abetted, it is said, by his parent, in the belief that it raised his own social prestige.

Francis in his early manhood was still the recognised leader in every manner of frolic, in games of absurd fancy and genius, in mimic parades associated with the mummery of "My lord of Misrule," always accompanied by practical jokes, which kept the little town in a buzz of excitement.

Amid it all he could not but be aware of the quiet reprimand of his mother, who met, however, the bodeful criticisms of her neighbours with the words, "I know he will, please God, become a good man."

The lad's mind had been nurtured in stories of chivalry. He would yet, he dreamt, become true knight-errant, and he nursed the project day and night. It took strange colouring in his imagination and was reflected in his games. He had been taught to associate it with the nobility, but of that he was to be disillusioned by degrees. The nobility, in fact, had fallen from the graciousness implied in the name. Instead of courtesy and gentleness they, for the most part, displayed only coarseness and vulgarity, while their attitude to the poor was oftentimes at once thoughtlessly and needlessly brutal. Nevertheless there were great and rare exceptions, illustrating knighthood at its best.

Francis was by nature kind of heart and courteous of speech. From time to time with sudden deep emotion he exhibited a generosity and consideration that amazed his fellows. His lips were pure. Otherwise in all ways he sought to go one better than his companions. This manner of life possessed so great a hold on him that, whatever he was engaged in, if his companions called for him to join in their revels he would hurry out at once. If at meat, he would leave his food untouched.

Such a course could not long continue. An unrest began

to prey upon him immediately the excitement was over. All the while, even if unconsciously, he was weighing and testing his experience, and disillusionment is the reaction of experience that does not strike true.

He was unable to diagnose that heart craving. He had had little religious teaching worthy the mention, other than, we surmise, through his mother. For religion was considered the sole concern of the priests. Nevertheless, from this time we trace his first questioning into life and into religion. One day, while attending some customers in his father's shop, a poor man entered begging an alms. "Give me an alms, in God's name," he said. Francis turned upon him sharply and bade him begone. But a moment later his face flushed with shame. "If he had asked a gift in the name of a noble, how readily would I have given it," he said to himself, "and he supplicated in God's name! Oh what have I done? What a clown and worthless wretch I am!" Thereupon, leaving his customers, he ran out of the shop after the beggar and gave to him liberally and with touching apology.

Heavy as was the torpor that lay then upon the Church, the word of religion was not wholly silent. Dissident voices were arising in many quarters; new sects appeared, some extravagant enough, yet for the most part by way of protest to the worldliness of the clergy.

Bernardoni was in no sense a religious man; but travelling as he did, he received and purveyed news of all kinds, and as one possessing information, he was eagerly sought after wherever he went. From his lips Francis would doubtless have heard of the strange puritan movement that had taken so strong a hold on the south of France, and of the leader, Peter Waldo, who insisted upon poverty as essential to the religious life. In contrast, the Church itself was tottering under the burden of its material prosperity. If the comparison drew from Bernardoni a shrug of disdain, to Francis it became food for quiet thought.



But there was one whom his father regarded with reverence, if not with fear, whose message was spreading far and wide through Italy. This was the Calabrian prophet, Joachim di Fiore, whose searching exposure of evil and summons to repentance, combined with the belief, uttered with intense conviction, of a new age at hand, stirred his hearers to the depths. As John the Baptist was forerunner to Christ, this preacher in quite a remarkable way was the forerunner of Francis, directing the eyes of the people to the light which the latter was to reveal.

Spite of an outer sternness there was an inner tenderness in his teaching. It held a promise of better things preparing for those who were ready. He taught that there were three great dispensations, respectively of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. In the first, man lived under the stern rule of the Law. In the second, the Law is superseded by Grace. In the third, that of the Spirit, men will dwell together in brotherhood because the word of God is written in their hearts. In the first man's relation to God is the obedience of a servant; in the second it is the filial obedience of a child; in the third it will be the realising of freedom through love. The first saw the shining of the stars; the second sees the glowing of the dawn; the third will behold the glory of the day. The first produced nettles; the second provides roses; the third will be an age of lilies.

When we consider that Joachim prophesied the third period, the Age of the Spirit, as very near at hand, we can understand something of the feeling of expectancy that his words aroused.

Commenting on the preaching in his own day, he declared that "dialectics close that which is open, obscure that which is clear, is the mother of useless talk, of rivalries, of blasphemy. The truth which is hidden from the learned will be revealed unto babes."

He taught that voluntary poverty was one of the character-

istics of the third period; and the ideal monk he portrayed was really a picture of a true Franciscan, whose only possession was a lyre.

One day he was preaching in a chapel when the light from the window became shadowed in darkness owing to heavy thunder clouds. Suddenly the clouds were rifted and the sun shone through with great splendour, flooding the sanctuary with light. Joachim paused in his discourse, his spirit greatly uplifted; then intoning the *Veni Creator*, he led the people out to silently worship at sight of the glory that spread around.

"In the evening of his days," writes Sabatier of this Calabrian seer, "he was able, like a new Simeon, to utter his *Nunc Dimittis*, and for a few years Christendom could turn in amazement to Assisi as to a new Bethlehem."

Who can doubt that Francis, even if it reached him indirectly, must have felt the quickening of that message?

In 1202 the neighbouring city of Perugia made war upon Assisi. The Assisians were defeated, and Francis was among those taken prisoner. By reason of the courtesy of his bearing, no less than the richness of his apparel, he was housed among the nobility who were made captive. For the first time he saw into their life from the inner side, and found it—empty. Nevertheless, for his own part he would pursue the ideal, become the knight "sans peur et sans reproche." Thus he meditated during his imprisonment.

After almost a year's captivity he was released. Then upon his return to Assisi he plunged again, and with renewed zest, into the old modes of life, as if to make up for lost time. Doubtless his spirit chafed for an outlet that he now saw was not likely to be realised, and he sought to free his energy in the only manner open to him. In those days there was little or no provision afforded to the young in ways of self-improvement and education.

A sharp barrier prevented the accomplishment of his

desire. At the same time the thought of leading a tradesman's life was exceedingly bitter to him. The passion went deeper than he knew, stirring in him a great unrest that was reflected in and accentuated by his erratic and extravagant manner of living. At length the physical body protested and he fell seriously ill.

During the pause of illness he was constrained into more serious thought. It was not merely a physical crisis. In the long convalescence, feelings hitherto held in check rose to torment him. He stood horrified at sight of the spectre of the meaninglessness of his life. He had no support to fall back upon. With eyes of unspeakable loneliness he looked out into the great Unknown. He felt into, but knew not, Religion. Inarticulate hitherto, it was, through strife, to break into original expression in him.

He sought relief in solitude, and he found it partially amid the quiet of nature. Nature in her beauty, her many surprises, her simplicity; the hills in the distance kissing the blue sky, the clear river, the woods, the heavens at night, the stillness so sweet, the pulse of quiet rest: she, he felt, held that which he sought: she knows the secret, yet cannot, cannot, convey it.

One day he entered a wayside chapel during the celebration of Mass, when, listening intently to the priest as he read some passages from the gospel, the words, "Follow thou Me!" came home to him with personal meaning, throbbing in his consciousness, filling him with strange emotion and agitation.

Nature gave him physical restoration. Then, as inwardly he was turning from the old, ceasing almost to desire it, the opportunity of which he had been debarred came to him. The early feelings returned at full tide. He was now able to enter the service of one of the nobles, a knight of Assisi, under orders to join Walter de Brienne, at that time warring in the south of Italy in support of Pope Innocent III. Walter was famed as one of the most gallant knights of the time.

Francis was enthusiastic. Eagerly he prepared himself for the journey, his father assisting him, regardless of cost, and with a splendour exceeding his companions. There was a great send-off as the little cavalcade rode out of Assisi, Francis with the badge of page upon his arm . . . .

Some shaking experience happened to him, and the old life was dead, never more to revive.

The narrative of the "Three Companions" relates a vision that came to him during bivouac on the first night of their journey.

In his sleep he heard one calling him by name, and he was taken to a palace where dwelt his bride. He was led through many rooms, and noticed that they were filled with armour, which he was told was for him and for his knights. Then was he asked: "Which of these two can benefit you most, the lord or the servant?" And he answered, "The Lord." "Why, then," came the reply, "do you turn from the lord to the servant—from a lord that is rich indeed, and give yourself to that which is poor and empty?"

Then Francis, waking, prayed, "Lord, what wouldst thou have me to do?" And the answer seemed to come to him, "Return!"

He had seen a beautiful thing with absolute conviction: Poverty adorned as a bride of surpassing wealth, and he her sworn knight.

Dwelling upon the thought of chivalry, a new meaning had wrought itself in him. He saw it in new and richer context, as amid the quiet, under the starlit heavens, the feeling broke upon him of the *infinite worth* of man as man, be he rich or poor.

There was that he looked upon which made him sick at heart. The fulfilment of his day-dream had brought the realisation of its hollowness. The spectacle he saw, the conversation he listened to, how different to what once had been.

It was hollow, empty; a false masquerade of the chivalry of the heart.

The songs of Romance that he loved belonged to a greater time, when true knightliness wedded heart and hand. Francis began to see that chivalry was an uprightness, a spiritual straightness, a poise of character, a dedication of the will. Its real expression was not in tournament and revel, but in succouring the poor and down-trodden.

Francis could not proceed with his fellows, but returned to Assisi alone and on foot, in a condition, it is said, of high fever. The new vision was as a troubled light on a dark horizon. An overwhelming turnover had taken place in his mind, with shaking effect. His manner of life became completely changed. Instead of associating with the rich he mingled with the poor, striving to fulfil a simple ministry of compassion. But for the most part he sought to be alone, and in solitude wrestled with the burden pressing on his heart.

The revulsion from the past was absolute. In an agony of renunciation he saw the shallowness, heartlessness, insincerity of the past, and gazed with something of horror upon what had been. He stood upon the ruin of the old, facing the unknown future with a question and a challenge.

But of what had been disclosed to him he knew not as yet the full meaning. It was felt rather than apprehended, for clear spiritual vision is the outcome of long wrestling. He was, however, touching an experience more foundational than he had yet realised, as through the open wound in his heart he became conscious of the living word. It came to him with healing, breathing upon him, it seemed, from every part of that beautiful Umbrian countryside. But at first it wrought in him a greater agony. It became like a fire in his members, as with alternate lure and repulsion the old life receded from him. It was a rending experience. The past had come up to judgment before him.

The place of that strife is shown to this day. The old

gods were dethroned in him; the mighty were cast down and the poor exalted. The spectacle of wealth and power no longer represented the fullest life. The ostentation of it was a mockery. In its place there grew a vision of a new society based upon mutual service. With this changed outlook he began to feel that life possessed a richer and more ample meaning. The conviction of Life as something intimately real took hold of him, a Reality which, in perception, is Truth; in expression, Love; and which is walled off (helled off, to use an expressive old Saxon word) by the power of money, inasmuch as the latter creates fictitious values.

The evil in his own experience and, as he imagined, the prime cause of the woe and unrest around found symbolic expression in the little coin that is passed from hand to hand. "It is the cause of all social evils, all civil dissensions, all wars," he replied to the bishop of Assisi, who had sought to dissuade him from the life of Poverty, when, at the court of Rome in behalf of the Order afterwards to be called by his own name, Francis desired from the Pope the unusual privilege always to remain poor. Even so the condition of freedom from possessions appeared correspondingly beautiful in his sight.

"When all men marry poverty  
There shall be no more poor,  
But every table shall be full,  
And open every door."\*

\* From poem entitled "Forecast," by W. R. Hughes.

## CHAPTER II

### THE COMING OF LADY POVERTY

WE have little conception today of the authority exercised by the Church in the days of Francis. It literally dominated the western world. Pope Hildebrand's dream of a great theocracy was all but realised by Innocent III, who pushed the papal claim of suzerainty over Christendom further than any of his predecessors. Unfortunately, with its increase of temporal and political power, the Church's spiritual life had correspondingly receded. The child of the age could not, however, but be impressed by the antiquity and majesty of the Church. For it antedated all history that he knew and was the greatest thing that his mind could conceive.

In the counsels of the monarchs its word was the weightiest. It held in control an anarchy that was ever ready to burst out, and which otherwise would have been unrestrained; an anarchy such as raged in England in Stephen's reign.

Indeed, had it not been for the protecting and mothering influence of the Church, the culture and civilisation of the western world might have been checked at its very outset.

Francis regarded the Church with pure, simple vision, seeing as in outline there the Church Invisible. Only gradually was he to find how far it was from demonstrating the ideal that was his vision.

An occasion occurred for a visit to Rome. It was probably a business errand, yet it was an answer to his heart's desire. He was longing for a richer field of service than as yet was possible. He pictured it as somehow in connection with the Church, though he was not clear as to the method. He had yet to discover the holy energy that is released in and through the activity of self-surrender.

Rome was the sacred city of the west, for it was the centre of the Western Church. There the venerable pontiff held his court, and from Peter's chair, as vicar of Christ, dispensed charity and justice. There the fathers of the Church met together in conclave. To the devout it was a great event to make pilgrimage there. It was at this moment significant in the life of Francis.

The young man made that pilgrimage with simple ardour, as with glowing love he conjured the ideal. He did not experience the setback that Luther did in a later age on a similar pilgrimage. He had not the analytic mind of the German reformer. Nevertheless, with a clear intuition he diagnosed what he saw, and from this time he began to approach with understanding the deep spiritual need of the hour.

The Church failed before the most simple test, for the poor stood at the gate unfed, while the shepherds of the flock lived sumptuously and were clad in costly raiment. Never was the Church more wealthy; never were the poor in greater need; never was such indifference between priest and people.

The meaning of this pilgrimage was, for Francis, that he made it the symbolic expression of the complete dedication of his will. He entered St. Peter's and before the shrine of the apostle he stood silent in contemplation. Many people entering or leaving the church paused to make an offering there. Coming to himself, Francis took his purse with all that it contained and impulsively flung it into the offertory box. It fell with a crash, drawing the attention of the bystanders, who were amazed at the rich offering. But Francis was rapt in his own thought, unaware of what was taking place around. The action followed directly the passionate resolve to make of his life a complete offering, in loving service, unto the ideal for which the Church stood, even if it did not realise. It was fitting that it should have been at the shrine of Peter, in the central church, representing all the churches of Christendom. It was both a consecration and a dedication.



There is a natural sequence in what follows. At the entrance to the church were a multitude of beggars awaiting the charity of passers by. Francis exchanged his garment with one of these and stood there for a whole day, almsbox in hand—a timid way of testing beforehand the experience toward which he was feeling.

Without doubt we catch here the very trend of his thought, the great reversion of his old life in the life of poverty after the pattern of Jesus Christ. Such a service demanded a full renunciation of what had been. He would make an *amende honourable* as knight of God and of Lady Poverty.

The past magnified in his eyes became a horror and loathing to him: we catch the feeling in many an expression.

When he had wrung his blessing from the Unseen with whom he strove, he turned unto the new life with that same energy he had indulged in the old. He was far too actively employed in thinking and doing good to fall needlessly into self-recrimination, lamenting his wasted days.

He may have thought that the Church would provide direction to his activity. There was, however, no open door for such as he. He would therefore devote his labour unto the least and lowest, and fulfil, as was meet, the humblest and most lowly service, carry his love unto the poor and down-trodden, unto the *minore* and the outcast from society.

Thus meditating, one day when on horseback he came full-face upon a leper who, with a loud piteous cry, demanded alms. Of all sights this was the one which Francis disliked most of all. Involuntarily he turned his horse away to avoid that unwholesome touch and presence. Thus upon the first trial his resolution failed him. He had not gone far, however, before, thoroughly discomfited and ashamed, he recalled himself and humbly came back to where the leper stood. He bent and kissed his hand as he would a priest's and gave to him his purse.

This was the point in his experience when the personal reactions began to decline, and the will of good, born in him, to ascend in blessing unto all. From that moment his heart was emancipated. The oppression that afflicted him at sight of poverty and pain was changed to a boundless compassion.

His ministry now became more clear and definite. He gave all his leisure to the poor. He went also among the lepers, tending to their needs with a charm and gentleness that won all hearts to him. In that escape of love his spirit found rest.

His father was, however, deeply offended. Viewing with secret approval his favoured son's wild life, in that it brought associations with the nobility, he watched the new turn of events with ill-concealed dismay. There thus grew an estrangement between father and son. In the home there was constant friction, to escape which Francis betook himself more and more to solitude. Peter Bernardoni felt it almost as a personal insult that his son should consort with the poor, and what was worse, had been seen to enter a lazaret-house, and he reproached him with great severity. Nor did Francis' old companions willingly see their friend separating from them.

One day, for the last time, he joined their frolic. When the revelry reached its height he, as so often before, was given the honour to preside at the banqueting board; a sceptre was put in his hand, and he was raised to the dais as "My Lord of Misrule." There as he sat he became lost in himself; "rapt in sweetness," it is said. "Surely he is in love," mockingly whispered the others. Francis caught the expression. "Yes, I am in love," he said, and with earnest emotion continued, "I am about to marry a lady fairer and purer than you could possibly imagine."

In his imagination there glowed the vision of his Lady Poverty, white and radiant, treading the beautiful earth, a presence eager and fragrant, the very spirit of freedom and grace under heaven. There was nothing mean or sordid in

the poverty idea of Francis. He lifted it up and transfigured it; it was the open door of his holy realisation.

Near by was the little half-ruined chapel of St. Damian, to which Francis frequently resorted for its quiet after the angry persecution to which he was subjected by his father. It was but a few minutes walk out of Assisi. It had the vantage of overlooking the plain, while it itself was hidden from below by a belt of pinewood.

One day kneeling before the altar, his soul breaking forth in an agony of prayer for guidance and vision, thus he prayed:

“Be found in me, O Lord, that in all things I may act only according to Thy holy will!”

For a moment he transcended time, touching the Reality, and in that communion became aware of an audible word of loving direction and a hand outstretched in blessing. The Unseen he was reaching toward became palpable to his perception, and he knew it to be true, always and for ever true. In that clear-seeing and hearing the Jesus to whom he had lifted his eyes and heart adoringly became a living Presence and, as if to the outer ear, yet speaking into his very depths, a voice that was ineffable spoke:

“Francis, seest thou not that My House is being destroyed? Go therefore and repair Me it.” Trembling in wonder and astonishment, he said:

“Gladly will I do it, O Lord!”

Thus was his prayer answered and his heart and mind bathed and soothed in great Love and Light. From that hour, it is said, was his heart pierced and melted by the remembrance of his Lord's passion, and ever while he lived did he bear in his heart the stigmata of the Lord Jesus.

He was child of his time, in that he felt by virtue of that example whose Passion was reflected in countless images studding the countryside, that he in his own body should take up and bear his share therein. He became exceedingly austere

toward his poor "brother Body," and was minded seldom if ever to spare himself. His physical weakness and suffering in his later years made him realise that in this respect he had not done wisely. "I have sinned much against poor brother Body," he said.

Francis now felt that his way was plain, for he had received a simple and direct command. In order that an altar-lamp might be kept burning he gave what money he had to the old priest in charge of the chapel. Then he sold his horse and all that he had, that he might use the proceeds to fulfil his mission. An inexpressible sweetness and calm had succeeded his anguish and spiritual uncertainty.

He was, however, disturbed and shaken by his father's bitter persecution, and feeling his position at home impossible, sought refuge in the little chapel. Meanwhile Bernardoni, angrier still at his son's failure to return home, sought him everywhere. Hearing at length where he was, he resolved, if need be, to carry him off by main force.

Francis, becoming aware that he was pursued, and knowing his father's violent temper, sought a hiding-place, so that his father was obliged to return to Assisi without him.

For some little time he remained hidden, but at length, upbraiding himself for his cowardice, he gathered up his courage and went boldly into Assisi to inform his father that he was determined to adhere to his new way of life. But so nondescript was his appearance, so pale and emaciated were his features, that he was taken by the children of the streets to be a halfwit. Hearing the clamour outside his house, Bernardoni came out and, recognising his son, violently threw himself upon him and dragged him in. He thrust him into a dark closet, with the intent to enforce his will on him. Unable, however, to break his resolution, he left him there a prisoner. Pica, his mother, in her turn sought to dissuade Francis. Then, unable to bear the sight of him so tortured, she set him free when her husband was away.

Bernardoni again sought him at St. Damian, demanding that he leave Assisi. Francis this time came boldly forth and declared that nothing could shake his resolution, and that having become Christ's servant, he, Bernardoni had no longer any claim to his obedience.

Bernardoni then appealed to the civil magistrates to enforce his son's banishment, but they, not wishing to interfere, replied that the matter fell under the ecclesiastical jurisdiction. Thus the matter was referred to the Bishop's court, the news creating great sensation. On the occasion of the trial the hall was packed with people.

The Bishop duly set forth the case, and simply advised Francis to return anything that he had belonging to his father. To the surprise of everybody, Francis, instead of replying, retired, and in a few moments reappeared naked, holding in his hands his clothes made into a bundle. These he laid before the Bishop with, also, the little money he still had. Then with a ringing voice, that all might hear, he said:

"Listen, all of you, and understand it well. Until this time I have called Peter Bernardoni my father, but now I desire to serve God. That is why I now return to him this money, for which he has given himself so much trouble, as well as this clothing and all that I have had from him, for from henceforth I desire to say nothing else than 'Our Father who art in heaven.' "

A murmur of anger went through the hall as Bernardoni was seen to gather up and carry off the money and clothing without any appearance of compassion or relenting, while the Bishop drew his cloak around Francis, who was trembling with emotion. The scene created an immense impression.

After this, Francis felt as if he had been liberated. The old ties no longer could bind him. He could scarcely contain the joy that surged in him, and speedily left the city to be alone with nature and with God. So full was his heart that

when he passed out of human hearing he sang at the top of his voice old French songs of his early delight. He felt free as he had never before. Having no possessions, he ran as a little child right into the arms of God. Nothing he could call his own, and yet in that nothing there was all. He had come to the point of proving what he had visioned in his heart. He felt the presence of Love Divine immanently near. All life seemed alive with God and the breath of the Spirit everywhere making all things sacred.

Lady Poverty now was all but visible, wondrously beautiful, a presence courteous and kind, gentle, sweet, caressing. The skylark sang, and gladly his heart mounted with its song. He felt it to be his wedding day. His sorrow was converted into joy, as through the door of his renunciation he passed into a new world of Love and Life. Poesy was born that day, and seeds sown that fructified into a succession of artists and poets; men like Giotto, Petrarch, Dante in Italy, Chaucer in England. The spirit of wonder in life was renewed, bursting through those dead-dark days to bless mankind. So one passing through great experience may tap hidden springs which, released, outflow with power unto the liberation of many.

Francis felt that having nothing he yet had all, that non-possession is the secret of All-possession, that God, who is all-in-all, deigns to possess the heart which is empty of all, even of that last outward possession, the selfhood.

While man possesses for himself he cannot be possessed of God. Love Divine can only reveal when the selfhood in man withdraws. "He who will lose his life for My sake, the same shall find it."

Well had Francis known and tested how superficial were the outward symbols of wealth and power, proving so often but the false veneer of a spiritual bankruptcy. He had imagined such to be the substance of good, but in experience found it to be as dust and ashes, and no more than the mirage of

the Real. Now, instead of the second-hand (content and satisfied with the appearance of good), he felt the direct experience, and God became free in him: the divine, the Real, pressing in sweetness into the very depths of his soul.

Indirectly man receives all his good from God, but it is passed through many hands, is bartered, unequally distributed, and the nature of the gift lost sight of, and it is enforced as by constraint under the brow of sweat through toil and labour. Francis had had enough and to spare, but the living fragrance, the aroma of truth was not there. That which is superficial ministers solely to the superficial, but what is true and real nourishes man's whole being.

Now the God-experience became original in the life of Francis. It was an immediate realisation of the Presence. Henceforth he would receive all his good direct from the Father's hand. He would know nought but the Love of God, filling full his being, becoming his property to give, a gift exceeding one hundredfold life's simple needs. Such Love is the fulfilling of the Law, and lifts man above possession and necessity. It is man's supreme gift, and in its pure activity God works as a free agent. Love is its own security. It is power and energy; it unfolds the divine originality that is in every soul. It is the consuming desire to give (for pure self-giving may only work on wheels of love), and is a gift priceless beyond all others.

Though man may not "awaken love until it please," he may, in himself and of himself, prepare the conditions necessary for Love's coming. By Love we enter into the Providence of God, for God is Love; but when we fail in Love we fall from that Providence, in that we lose our intimacy of foothold therein and pass out of the clear cognition of truth into the more difficult way of experience. But Love dominant in the soul, man's human heart pulsing rhythmically with the great Heart of Good, his mind uplifted beyond the narrow personal scope, yet finding the larger, more intimate-wise *personal*,

there is surely the realisation of "knowing and being known of God." It is the simple, childlike apprehension of that which truly is, becoming the consciousness of the caring, sustaining goodness of God, a Providence that works myriad-handed through all life's relationships.

With Francis the Love of God became his great gift to bestow, his hundredfold more gift than any temporal gift received. Hence the expression "give for the Love of God," when in his mission of love, other sources failing, he would ask for alms. The receiving of alms thus became to him a very sacrament, for through it he felt that God was stretching out his hand of good unto his little child. Thus the gift was received with great joy.

Therefore it is a mistake to think of penury in association with Francis' poverty. For him it was not such, it was wealth, God's goodness full to overflowing; it was a rapturous, holy thing, eager and free, a fount of joy welling within the heart. The loving providence of God enfolds the lover of God, he who gives of himself in utter loving service.

"The poverty of Francis," wrote St. Bonaventura, "was of such abundant sufficiency that it supplied by its wondrous power the needs of them that assisted him, so that neither food nor drink nor house failed them, when other resources proved of none avail."



## CHAPTER III

### THE NEW BROTHERHOOD

FRANCIS did not return immediately to St. Damian. The new sense of freedom was so full, the release to his spirit so great, that he had to be alone. As with throbs of joy, a richer Spirit entered his life and made itself his very own. His whole frame thrilled in response to this embrace of the greater Love. He became quiet and still, encompassed in the Peace "that passeth understanding."

The glow of love in his heart could not be quenched even by rough treatment. He chanced to stumble upon the haunt of some robbers, who with rough jests divested him of his scanty clothing and rolled him in the snow. He rose with a laugh and a song of praise upon his lips. He obtained a worn garment at the price of some menial service in a monastery near by.

Within a few days he was back in Assisi, dwelling among the lepers. His hands were indeed empty of worldly riches, but overflowing with that wealth more real which these at their best but symbolise. All his heart outflowed in tender ministry as gently, almost caressingly, he served these poorest of the poor. He moved among them as an angel of light. His presence was the richest word he could convey. All that he did was more than repaid for him by their touching gratitude and affection.

When he returned to St. Damian he at once proceeded to fulfil the charge that Christ had given to him in so wonderful a way. It was, in his quiet, simple interpretation, to rebuild this little ruined chapel.

He fashioned a hermit's dress for himself, and, so clad,

made his way into the city, and in the squares where people congregated drew their attention by singing a few hymns. Having done this, he would speak of the purpose he had in hand.

“Those who will give me one stone,” he said, “will have one reward, those who will give me two stones will have two rewards, those who will give me three will have three rewards.” He made a little rhyme of it.

His eagerness evoked a willing response, and, taking little notice of the mockery many at first showered upon him, he would carry the stones away upon his shoulders, although his slight frame was ill-fitted for such work.

The old priest, appreciative of Francis’ endeavours, and solicitous of his welfare, sought to lighten his labour by preparing his repasts, obtaining delicate food such as he might have been used to in his own house. Francis, feeling this was not quite in accordance with the new life he had chosen, would not let his friend continue these ministrations. He determined to carry out his part more fully by obtaining his food pilgrim-wise from door to door.

The first sight of the broken food in his wallet was almost too much for him. His courage for a moment gave way, till, partaking of the bread as a sacrament, it became sweet and pleasant to his taste, and rich and satisfying.

There was, however, one experience from which he shrank. It was the coming into contact with the persons and circumstances connected with his old life. Such a meeting was, of course, inevitable, and he braced himself for it with a rare courage. We read that on one occasion, meeting his brother in a church, the latter mockingly said to a companion, audibly enough for Francis also to hear, “Go ask Francis to sell you a pennyworth of his sweat.” Francis turned round and very gently, but with fervour, answered his brother in the French tongue: “No, I will sell that sweat much dearer to my Lord!”

The enthusiasm with which he made his propaganda was contagious, and many joined him in his work. It is an ample testimony to the good craftsmanship that it stands to this day. St. Damian's was soon finished, and naturally enough they followed it up by restoring other ruined chapels, of which there were several near to Assisi. The most noteworthy was that of St. Mary of the Angels, known as the Portiuncula (Porziuncola) or "the church of the little portion"; notable indeed because of its after history.

Two years passed by, and contrary to general expectation, the warmth of his devotion had in nowise cooled. The love of his heart shone with purer, more single flame, so that people took note and marvelled. Jests that at first had been lightly levelled at him had been silenced by his gentle courtesy and simple, unaffected service.

He chiefly dwelt in the lazaretto, and perhaps the greater portion of his time was actually spent among the lepers. But often his heart was too full for him to remain silent and he sought to do a little wayside preaching. His words at first were few and hesitating, but he spoke with an earnest conviction that constrained the attention, and many paused to listen to his teaching. He had begun to realise that the command of his Lord might after all bear a fuller interpretation than he had previously imagined, and that it was the spiritual edifice which stood in most need of renewal and repair. The time was urgent for the revival of pure religion.

Up to this time he had worn a hermit's cloak, with staff and sandals and almsbox.

One day he sat in the little Portiuncula, attentive to the reading of the priest who made occasional ministry there. The latter had opened the Gospel, and as he read Francis became rapt in vision. Once again he realised the presence of Christ. It was no longer the priest that he heard, but Christ speaking unto him vividly, directly:

“Wherever you go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand. Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, cast out devils. Freely ye have received, freely give. Provide neither silver nor gold nor brass in your purses, neither scrip nor two coats nor shoes nor staff, for the labourer is worthy of his meat.”

These words came to him as a revelation, an immediate answer to all his inward searching. “This is what I want,” he cried; “this is what I was seeking for: henceforward I will strive with all my power to put it into practice.”

Having received this new divine word of direction, he at once put aside his staff, his scrip, his purse and his shoes, eager to obey the command to the very letter.

The very next morning he went up to Assisi and began to preach. His words came tremblingly earnest, straight from his heart, penetrating by their simple appeal into the conscience of his hearers. And indeed many hearts were touched, many lives were altered by that gentle message of peace and good will, of love one to another. His preaching gained by virtue of its very contrast to the inept, homiletic preaching so common in that age, so far removed was it from the Gospel word of Love that has power to renew the lives of men.

In the two years or more that had passed since Francis had publicly severed himself from the old life the reality of his conversion was established beyond all manner of doubt. The early scoffings and abuse gave way before a new feeling of respect and admiration. His love was greatly triumphant.

He now held the constant thought of humbly treading in the footsteps of Jesus, and in beautiful vision of a new discipleship he dreamed of eleven other companions, making twelve with him, following the guidance of the unseen, though not unfelt, Saviour of men, as He should direct.

It was not long before the dream began to be realised through the spontaneous act of a wealthy man of Assisi.

Bernard of Quintaville. The latter long and earnestly had been watching Francis, "admiring in secret," noting the beautiful religious growth, so striking a contrast to what had been. From time to time Francis had accepted his loving invitation to spend the night with him.

On one such occasion Bernard opened out his heart to him. Through long years he had looked for and prayed for such an expression of religion as Francis now revealed. He was older than Francis. Nevertheless, accepting with all his heart the message he preached, he determined to join with him, to live as he lived, gladly surrendering all his wealth.

"If a man," said Bernard, "had received many gifts in trust from his lord, and had kept them many years and wished no longer to keep them, how might he best dispose of them?"

"He should return them to the giver," answered Francis.

"It is for that reason," said Bernard, "that I desire to give my worldly goods back to Christ who gave them to me; and, dear brother, I desire to do it in such a way as it may seem good to you."

It was with a swelling heart that Francis answered as he gripped his hand:

"At day-dawn, my brother, let us go into the sanctuary and learn from the Gospel the way the Lord showed to his disciples."

The very next morning they were joined by a third disciple, Peter, a native of Assisi. The three together went to St. Nicholas' church, where, after praying and hearing of Mass, Francis opened the book that lay on the altar, and read from the Gospel the words of Jesus (already quoted) when he sent his disciples forth two by two to preach his message.

"My brothers," said Francis, "this is our life and our rule and that of all who join us. Go, then, and do as you have heard."

The legend records that three times he opened the book in honour of the Trinity, and that each time it opened of its own accord at the verses describing the apostolic life:

“If thou wilt be perfect, go sell that which thou hast and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow Me!” (Matt. xix, 21).

“Then he called his twelve disciples together and gave them power and authority over all devils, and to cure diseases. And he sent them to preach the kingdom of God, and to heal the sick. And he said unto them, Take nothing for your journey, neither staves, nor scrip, neither bread, nor money, neither have two coats apiece. And whatsoever house ye enter into, there abide, and thence depart. And whosoever will not receive you, when ye go out of that city, shake off the very dust from your feet for a testimony against them. And they departed, and went through the towns, preaching the gospel and healing everywhere,” (Luke ix, 1-6).

“Then said Jesus to his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it, and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul,” (Matt. xvi, 24-26).

In the face of everything, it was a magnificent resolution which they made, requiring immense enthusiasm to support it. But such enthusiasm they found in Francis, whose spirit shone with the glowing certitude of the rightness of his course. So were their own hearts enkindled that gladly they joined with him to live this new life, not so much to preach as to be that which they saw in him, knowing the same freedom, simplicity, peace, love, that, as he so frequently taught, they might convert people not so much by their preaching as by their lives. Their object was to go about doing good, and

only as occasion offered to bear their witness. And then it happened, we read that, while some listened willingly, others scoffed. There were many who overwhelmed them with questions: "Whence came you? Of what Order are you?" And they answered very simply: "We are penitents, natives of the city of Assisi!"

The passages from the Gospel became the Rule of the little brotherhood, if at the beginning it could be said to have had a Rule. It has been rightly said that Francis himself was the Rule, and his was no mere obedience to the letter, but rather to the spirit of the Gospel.

The commencement of their apostolate was signalled by the distribution of Bernard's goods, which incident brought to them another disciple.

Now while Bernard was giving his goods in largesse\* unto the poor, Francis standing by, a priest named Silvester drew near; noticing the money being given away so freely, we read, "the flame of covetousness was kindled in him." Remembering that Francis had purchased some stones for the repairing of St. Damian, he now said to him, "Brother, you did not pay me in full by any means for those stones I sold to you."

At these words Francis stood amazed, and, turning to Bernard, he thrust his hands into his cloak, drew them forth full of coins, which he gave to the priest. And, with fervour of spirit, he filled his hands a second time, saying as he gave him the money, "Have you now your payment in full, Sir Priest?" And he answered, "Yes, I have it in full, Brother."

The priest hurried away "joyously," we read. If that, however, was so, it soon turned to utter misery and shame and self-contempt, as he contemplated what he had done. When he retired that night to a troubled slumber there arose in his mind image after image of Francis as he had seen and

\* "He gave joyfully of all his possessions to widows, to orphans, to prisoners, to monasteries and to hospices and pilgrims, and in these ways Francis helped him faithfully and wisely."—*Fioretti*.

known him, contrasting his life and teaching with the lives and teaching of the priests like himself, until his image assumed the lineaments of Christ. Then in vision he saw that from the mouth of this despised man there proceeded an immense cross, the arms of which extended eastward, westward, southward, northward, until they embraced the whole earth. All his covetousness was swept away, and it was not long before he also attached himself to Francis, so that the latter had few more devoted companions than Silvester, of whom it is written in the *Fioretti*\* that he "walked with God," for which reason Francis came to consult him in many seasons of difficulty.

But his third follower, and the fourth disciple, was Egidio (Brother Giles), who perhaps of all the brothers came nearest in spirit and spontaneity to Francis, who was wont to call him "the perfect knight of his Round Table." On St. George's day, 1209, eight days or so from the beginning of the little group, he came with eagerness to Francis, seeking him out. Falling on one knee, and with outstretched arms, he asked with great fervour that he might be admitted as one of them, for the Love of God.

"God has in this, dear brother," said Francis, "shown Himself very, very gracious to you."

Calling Bernard, he said:

"God has sent us a good brother, for whom we should all rejoice in the Lord!"

A few days went by, and Giles was still in his secular garb. A beggarman strayed into their midst, requesting an alms. Francis turned lovingly to Giles, and said: "Let us give this mantle of yours to our poor brother!"

With eager joy and praise, we read, Giles at once took it off his back and gave it to the poor man. "And it seemed that God had poured new grace into his heart, for that he had done this thing with so great joy."

\* *The Little Flowers of St. Francis.*



They were now able to put into practice the gospel behest to journey forth two by two. We read how the four separated into twos, Francis taking Giles as companion, while Bernard and Peter went together, in this way obeying the scriptural direction.

Francis and Giles took their way across the mountains into the March of Ancona. Their hearts were full to overflowing, that they could not restrain their joy and praise. Surely a precious seed was sown that day, for of all places this was to bear the richest fruit. Francis' method was a personal one. He would speak a loving word to any villager whom they passed, or to the two or three whom he might gather in the market-place, while Giles would add earnestly and simply:

"Indeed you cannot do better than what my spiritual father advises, for his word is right and true."

The journey of the other two is not recorded.

The early brothers had no fixed abode, but from the commencement the little Portiuncula was their favourite meeting-place. Their nightly lodging was determined by the circumstances of the moment; a lazaretto, a hayloft, a church porch; anywhere, indeed, where with least offence they might make their bed.

The public greeting was generally one of derision mingled with much rough horse-play. The unusual habit they had chosen, their poverty and simplicity, provoked a great deal of mirth.

The *Fioretti* records many incidents in which good humour, courtesy, patience and love triumphed over boisterous ill-will and insult.

The following story is well illustrative of this. In the early days of the Order, Francis sent Brother Bernard to Bologna, that there he might "bear some fruit unto God." The children of the city, noticing his poor and threadbare habit, began to treat him derisively, making mock at him. But Bernard bore

all these things with patience and with joy, for the love of Christ. And with earnest purpose he made his way to the market-place.

No sooner, however, had he sat down than many children, and even men, mockingly drew near, and some coming from behind, and others in front, plucked at his hood, pelted him with dust and with stones, and pushed him this way and that way.

Day after day this was repeated, Bernard bearing his rough usage with joyous uncomplaining spirit, till at last his patience conquered; and then people became interested and began to enquire into his message.

The expression of joy in religion, associated as it was with voluntary poverty, made these early Franciscan brothers a source of wonder and interest to the beholder. The originality of it all could not fail to draw attention and, naturally, at the beginning, ridicule. But it was their contagious happiness which broke down every opposition. Their refreshing message fell like April rain upon a dry and thirsty soil.

It was not long before all derision melted and taunts were made silent, for it was seen the movement had come to stay. The earnest words of Brother Giles, "He speaks true," were to become the general thought.

The dream of Francis was now being realised. How speedily the first four in this new discipleship had increased to twelve, each responding eagerly to that same invitation as of old: "Follow Me."

Then was his life like a great music. A very apostolic fervour was upon him as he went to and fro. It was the power of a great humility, equal to the dust, yet touching the heavens above. His spirit was a flame of love, ever quickening his fellows to a high enthusiasm.

The brothers oftentimes returned from their journeys with sad stories of ill-treatment, but in his presence their courage

was restored, their joy renewed. When he spoke, confiding in them his own burning faith and radiant vision, how their hearts would glow once more!

“I saw a multitude of men coming towards us,” he said, “asking that they might receive the habit of our holy religion, and lo, the sound of their footsteps is still echoing in my ears.”

## CHAPTER IV

### THE PAPAL BENEDICTION

COURTESY belonged to chivalry, and Francis was the soul of courtesy. He, as knight of religion, would outdo the knight-errant in its exercise. With it he met every difficulty and greatly overcame. It flowed out from his love as a radiant sunshine, magic with blessing. By its power ill was turned to good and oftentimes enemy to friend.

“Know, dear brother,” said he, “courtesy is one of the properties of God, who gives his sun and the rain to the just and unjust by courtesy; and courtesy is the sister of charity, by which hatred is extinguished and love is cherished.”

He was courteous to all, to the poor even more than to the rich, and not only so, but to every living creature. It is especially manifest in his relations to the clergy, from whom sprang most of the opposition to the movement. Perhaps it was natural enough, for, worldly-minded to a degree, they were all the more resentful of any apparent intrusion on their domain. Not that every priest was such: true prophets and priests were to be found even in the darkest days. But generally it was only too true. Religion died in the Church before it became superstition among the people.

The corruption in the Church is reflected in the amazing satire of Walter de Map, entitled “Bishop Goliath,” which so caught hold of the popular imagination of the time that it speedily circulated through Western Europe. “The whole body of the clergy, from Pope to hedge-priest, is painted as busy in the chase for gain,” writes J. R. Green, the historian. “Out of the crowd of figures which fills the canvas of the

satirist: pluralist vicars, abbots 'purple as their wines,' monks feeding and chattering together, like parrots, in the refectory, rises the Philistine bishop, light of purpose, void of conscience, drunken, unchaste, the Goliath who sums up the enormities of all. . . . Powerless to hold the wine-cup, Goliath trolls out the famous drinking-song that a hundred translations had made familiar:

"Die I must, but let me die drinking in an inn!  
Hold the wine-cup to my lips, sparkling from the bin!  
So, when angels flutter down to take me from my sin,  
'Ah, God have mercy on this sot,' the cherubs will begin!"

The little stone that would slay this Goliath was not, however, to be found in the caricature of Walter de Map, but much rather in the loving words of Francis.

We can thus understand why it was this little lay Brotherhood found so quick a response in the hearts of the people. Their contrast with the priesthood was exceeding great. They preached as they practised, and practised what they preached. Their poverty and simplicity stood out against a background of corruption and materialism.

"Let us consider," said Francis to the little group that had gathered around him, "that God in his goodness has not called us merely for our own salvation, but also for that of many, that we may go through all the world exhorting people more by our example than by words. . . . Be not fearful on the ground that we appear little and ignorant, but simply and without disquietude preach repentance. Have faith in God, who has overcome the world, that his spirit may speak in you and by you, exhorting men to be converted and keep his commandments. You will find men of faith, gentleness and goodness, who will receive you and your words with joy; but you will find others and in greater numbers who will speak evil of you, resisting you and your words. Be strong

therefore to endure everything with patience and humility.’’

Hearing this, the brethren, we are told, began to be agitated, but Francis cheered them, saying: ‘‘Have no fear at all . . . . Commit yourselves to God with all your cares, and He will care for you.’’

Many at the beginning, misled by the appearance of the friars, refused them hospitality. Ofttimes the Brothers, having undergone all manner of rough usage during the day, were unable to find shelter for the night. On one special occasion this was the experience of Bernard and his companion:

‘‘They had gone to Florence, and there, though they sought through all the city, they could find no shelter. Coming at length to a house which had a portico, and under the portico a bench, they said to each other: ‘‘We shall be comfortable here for the night.’’

The mistress of the house denying them hospitality, they humbly asked permission to sleep upon the bench, to which request she gave her assent. But later her husband entered and angrily rebuked her. ‘‘Why have you allowed these knaves to stay under our portico?’’ he said. ‘‘I would not allow them into the house,’’ she answered, ‘‘but gave them permission to sleep under the portico, where there is nothing for them to steal but the bench.’’

The cold was sharp, but taking them for thieves, no one would give them a covering. But they, after having enjoyed no more sleep than was needful, warmed only by divine warmth, having for covering only their Lady Poverty, in the early dawn went to the church near by to meditate and pray.

The lady of the house, as it happened, went there also. Perceiving the friars at devotion, she said to herself: ‘‘If these men actually were rascals and thieves as my husband said, they would not remain thus in prayer.’’

While she was thus reflecting she noticed a man named Guido going round bestowing alms to the poor in the church, who when he came to the friars would have given a piece of money to them as to the others, but they declined it, saying: "No, we do not wish it." "Why," he said, somewhat surprised, "you are poor. Why then do you not accept it like the others?" "It is true that we are poor," replied Bernard, "but poverty does not weigh upon us as upon other poor people, for by the grace of God, whose will we are obeying, we have voluntarily become poor." Much amazed, he said: "Did you ever have possessions?" "Yes," they answered, "we have been wealthy, but for the Love of God have given everything away . . . ."

The lady, seeing that the friars had refused the alms, then drew near to them, and said apologetically: "I will most gladly receive you in my house if you would be pleased to lodge there."

"May the Lord recompense you for your good will," they answered humbly.

But Guido, learning that they had not been able to find shelter, took them to his own house, saying: "Here is a refuge prepared for you by the Lord; I would have you remain in it as long as you desire."

Kindly treated by him, their reception by the many was as yet far otherwise, for on all sides they met with ignominy and insult. They received it, however, with patience, returning gentleness and courtesy. "Though despoiled even of their clothing, they would not ask for its restitution, but, if moved by pity, men gave back to them what they had taken away, they accepted it thankfully." Some threw mud upon them, some put dice into their hands and invited them to play, others would catch them by the cowl and drag them about.

But, seeing how joyful they were in the midst of ill-treat-

ment and that they neither received nor carried money, and that by their love for one another they were seen to be true disciples, many felt so reproved and conscience-stricken that they came to ask their pardon. And they indeed pardoned them with a full heart, taking the opportunity thus opened to give their message.

Francis had the rare wisdom not to condemn, but ever to forgive and to practise that divine art wherever he went. Even as he was winning the hearts of the people so he sought to win the good will of the priests. He would not condemn the Church because of its representatives. He met the priest in recognition of his holy office, and would have his brethren do likewise. Were they not ordained to minister the sacred office, touching the holy elements with their hands?

He taught his brethren both by word and example to be humble toward the clergy. "We have been sent in aid of the clergy for the salvation of souls, that what is wanting in them may be supplied by us," he used to say. "The winning of souls is pleasing to God, and this we can do better in peace than in discord with the clergy. If they hinder the welfare of the people, we must leave the rebuke to God. . . . Gently submit therefore to their direction without opposition by reason of their office, and do not antagonise them by assuming their privileges."

"In this way," he said, "we will win both priest and people. And it is more pleasing to God than if we were to gain the good will of the people at the expense of the good will of the clergy. Let us be charitable in our thought towards them. Yet let us in our service make up for their defects. But having done this, we should be the more humble."

The brothers were the least of all, but in a higher reckoning the last would be first.



On one occasion, as we read in the *Speculum*,\* Francis said: "The order and the life of the friars is a special little flock which the Son of God in these latter times has asked of his heavenly Father, saying, "Father, I would that thou make and give me a new and humble folk unlike all others who have gone before, content to possess me alone." And the Father said: "My Son, that which thou hast asked is done" . . . concerning which indeed Christ spoke in the Gospel, saying, "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom," and again, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren ye have done it unto Me!"

In these bold simple words we see where his thought lies. He takes his religion fresh from his Lord. To the "poor in spirit" is the Kingdom promised, but Francis applied it in an especial way to the little Brotherhood.

They belonged to the common people, spoke in their homely way, called themselves *Minores*, after the poor and disfranchised in city and in country to whom the name *minore* was ignominiously applied. By it they identified themselves with the least and lowest.

It was an action entirely in keeping with their humility which was poverty translated into spiritual terms and equally essential in the practice of gospel perfection. As poverty is the freedom from possessions, so humility is the simplicity of the soul void of egoism. With Francis the two were inseparably associated.

"The blessed treasure of poverty is so excellent and divine that we are unworthy to possess it. . . . By its virtue all earthly and transitory things are trampled under foot, all stumbling-blocks are removed from among us, and the human mind is most closely united to the eternal God. . .

\* *The Mirror of Perfection.*

“This is it which unites us to Christ on the Cross, which hides us with Christ in the tomb; by it we rise with Christ from the sepulchre and ascend with him to heaven.

“Know, dear brothers,” he said, “poverty is the straight road to salvation; it is the purse of humility, it is the root of perfection. It is the treasure which we read of in the Gospel that was hidden in the field, to buy which a man should sell all that he has, and in comparison with which all that can be given for its purchase is to be accounted as nothing. And he who would attain to this height must lay aside not only worldly prudence, but even all knowledge of letters, that so, stripped of all things, he may enter into the power of God, and naked, offer himself into the arms of the crucified.”

They were for him the two posts or pillars of the temple gate by which man may enter into the knowledge of God in the very present, and so realise now the beginning of the new society, at once a social and spiritual regeneration. Such poverty would imply mutual service without that hoarding which upsets the equity of good. It would give freedom of movement, making possible swift obedience to the prompting of the Spirit. He would show the poor by example how near they were to the Kingdom of God. If we stand naked, in true poverty and humility before God, He will clothe us, and feed us, and care for us.

To the poor he was all compassion, meeting them with an especial reverence and gentleness.

“Whenever you see a poor man you should consider the poverty of our Lord and of his Mother. And in like manner when you behold the sick, you should remember the infirmities Christ took upon himself.”

When the first laughter died down people began to regard the message of this lay Brotherhood with all the more interest

in that it had nothing whatever to do with the priesthood. Their strength lay in their freedom from ecclesiasticism, for which reason Francis declined the offer that they should join the ranks of the clergy. Their message was religious, their practice social.

“Your way of life, not owning anything, seems to me very harsh and difficult,” said the bishop of Assisi one day. “My lord,” answered Francis, “if we possessed property we would need weapons for its defence; for it is the origin of all quarrels and lawsuits. The holding of wealth has proved in so many ways an obstacle to the love of God and of one’s neighbour, that for these reasons we do not desire temporal goods.”

“The Pope would grant you special privileges helpful to your mission,” they were told; privileges which would tend to remove the difficulties encountered with the clergy, who in fact often went out of their way to thwart their labours.

“Love is our privilege,” said Francis, “and it is God-given. With it we need no other privilege save that of poverty, which is the privilege of being without privileges. It is our priceless overcoming gift: it is the sword of courtesy, the armour of good will. With it we will conquer the prejudice of priest and people.”

“Love makes all heavy things light, all bitter things sweet. . . . Let us then love with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our mind and with all our strength, with all our understanding and with all our powers.”

It would, however, be right and good, they all agreed, to obtain the Holy Father’s sanction and blessing. That it would be readily given they had no doubt whatever.

We see the little body of men, stated in the legend to be twelve in number, wending single file in the direction of Rome.

Glad and eager were they, confident in the reception that would be given them. Francis was absorbed in prayerful thought, conscious as he was of the significance of this journey. They took it as a happy omen that everywhere there were kindly souls who gave them food and shelter.

But instead of the instant and cordial welcome from Christ's vicegerent which they had fondly anticipated, and of the glad love of a father at sight of his children obedient to Christ's command in their practise of "gospel perfection," they met at first with rebuffs, and it was several days before they could obtain the interview desired.

Before he had access to the Pope, Francis had first to meet the questioning and cross-questioning of bishops and cardinals. Their advice to this humble and inobtrusive man, not at all at his ease, was that his way was too hard and difficult to follow, and that they had better enter one of the existing Orders.

At length, by reason of his persistency, one of the cardinals, Giovanni di San Paolo, was deputed to interview Francis and report concerning the matter. Having done this, he presented him to the Pope, not without a touch of cynicism, as "one who has achieved gospel perfection, and is carrying on a mission for the reform of the Church." He then retired, and the Pope addressed himself to Francis and his companions who stood behind.

"My dear children," he said, "your life appears to me to be too severe; I see your fervour and have no doubt of your sincerity of purpose, but I have also to consider those who come after you, lest your mode of life should be beyond their strength." So saying, he dismissed them, promising to consult the cardinals, and he recommended them to commit the matter to prayer, that they might know God's will.

Had not their mission indeed its origin in prayer, and its continual inspiration and support through the power of prayer? They now fell back upon prayer as the last resort;

it was all they could do. It brought to Francis new courage and conviction, and he returned boldly to the Pope with a parable on his lips.

“There was in the desert a woman who was very poor, but very beautiful. A great king, passing by that way, and seeing her great beauty, wished to take her for his wife, for he thought that he might have beautiful children through her. And so they were married, and many sons were born to them.

“When they grew up, their mother, gazing at them fondly and proudly, said: ‘My sons, you have no cause to feel ashamed, for you are the lawful offspring of the king. Go therefore to his court, and he will give you everything you need.’

“When they came to the court the king admired their beauty, and perceiving in them his own likeness, enquired of them: ‘Whose sons are you?’ And they told him: ‘We are the sons of a poor woman who lives in the desert.’

“When he heard this he clasped them to his heart with great joy, saying, ‘Have no fear, for indeed you are my children. And if strangers eat at my table, how much more shall you that are my lawful sons.

“Then the king sent word to the woman to send all her sons to the court, that they might be nurtured there.”

When we realise in his description of the woman, very poor yet very beautiful, and living in the desert, that Francis is speaking of his Lady Poverty, how the story lights up in meaning.

As he explains his parable to the Holy Father he adds: “The King of kings has certified that He will provide for all the sons He may have through her. If God watches over all, how much more are we, who are his and her children, under His sustaining care?”

The mission, he said, had God's approval, God's sanction, beyond any word of man, and what they merely wished from the Holy Father was the sanction of his good will. The mission being in God's hands was His concern, and the Rule itself was the Manifesto of Jesus, and could not be questioned. They had but come for his fatherly benediction.

The Pope, before whom kings trembled, had to bow before this simple man. He was impressed not a little by his boldness, and there was no other course open to him but to signify his approval. He was too honest to resent the hidden censure of the priesthood implied in the parable of Francis, nor would have wished to deny that this little group of penitents followed more truly in the footsteps of Christ.

The matter was argued in the Consistory. It was contended that to live in this manner was obviously beyond human power. "And yet," said one of the cardinals, "if we say that the observance of Gospel perfection is irrational and impossible, are we not convicted of blasphemy against Christ who has given us the Gospel?" They knew only too well that one of the chief causes of spiritual decline was that the clergy held great possessions. In the end a wise counsel prevailed.

The narrative records that the Pope blessed them: "Go, my children," he said, "and may God be with you. Preach penitence to everyone, as the Lord may deign to inspire you. It may be that your numbers will greatly increase and your influence grow. Come then again to us and we will concede all that you ask." The Pope required, however, that the little body should appoint a nominal leader or superior, to whom they might communicate if the need were to arise. Francis was naturally chosen.

When they received the papal blessing Francis felt an immense gratitude and eagerly expressed their full obedience, for the will of the Pope could be no other than that of Christ himself. They were confident of his approval because of their

obedience to the Gospel. Thus their simplicity triumphed, expressing as it did what could not be gainsaid.

It was insisted, however, before they left, that they should receive the tonsure, which was at once the outward sign of the Pope's approval, and the seal of their obedience and loyalty to the Church.

Francis may have felt a certain misgiving and hesitancy before he agreed to this, but in the overflow of gratitude on receiving the papal blessing, and by reason of his own innate humility regarding himself and his wisdom as least of all, he received the decision of the court as a wisdom greater than his own.

## CHAPTER V

### RIVO TORTO

THE recognition and blessing of the Pope was palpable witness of the divine approval and benediction. So Francis and the brothers felt, in their rich simplicity.

It established the little mission more than anything else could have done. It was a source of joy and strength. With hearts full to overflowing they left the great city, glad to leave the artificial surroundings behind, glad to get into the open country, where they might freely express the emotion that they felt. The first valley they entered rang with their songs of praise.

They were now to undergo a test of suffering and of faith. They were journeying through an unfamiliar country. The road they were taking stretched northward through the inhospitable Campagna. No words, it is said, could describe the sufferings of the traveller in this region, if unprepared. "The feet sink in a soft, tenuous dust which with every footstep is sent up in clouds; it covers you, penetrates your skin, and parches you." Francis and his brethren, according to their practice, had made no provision. They stepped bravely forward, trusting in God. But it is recorded that their sufferings were so great that they would have perished had it not been for timely aid. It came as the very providence of God at the moment of their greatest need.

Throughout the long and tedious way the moral grandeur of Francis had shone out, heartening and maintaining the spirit of his companions. "Have good cheer," he said; "God is with us, He is but testing our faith."

Faith indeed greatly triumphed, their courage returned,



and their joy rang out in song. It brought the certitude of God as Saviour and Redeemer, even unto the practical issue. They felt an inward liberation, a baptism of a new freedom. They had, if it were but for a brief space, become as little children, of whom Jesus said, "of such is the kingdom of heaven, for their hearts are filled with gratitude to God, who had met them in their weakness. As they passed out of the desert tract into the lovely country beyond they felt that they were treading upon sacred ground. "Surely the presence of God is in this place."

Having no plans, they would fain have stayed here to enjoy the contemplative life which had so great an attraction to the best minds of that age. They rested awhile, waiting on God, seeking guidance. Their hearts were melted in the reaction from the tension of that nightmare journey. For the moment they trod that ground of humility where is set the mystic ladder unto heaven. Prayer and praise found rich, full utterance. Sweet was their fellowship, deep their communion.

It is recorded of Francis that, taking upon himself the difficulties of each of the brothers as if they were his own, he would seek the place of prayer, and in self-surrender cry, "God be merciful to me a sinner."

Then by degrees, as we read in the *Speculum*, "an unspeakable joy and surpassing sweetness would begin to overflow his inmost heart, so that he stood aloof from himself." It was as a sweet light shining from within, dispersing every shadow of darkness.

"At such a time there came upon him such assurance of forgiveness, that his spirit seemed to be caught up into heaven, and the capacity of his mind enlarged, so that he beheld clearly what would come to pass."

And he said, "Be comforted, my brothers, and in nowise discouraged, though we appear to be simple and of no

account, for the Lord hath shown me that our work will be enlarged and His family multiply. I have seen a great multitude of people coming to us, and desiring to join with us in the habit of holy religion. And lo! the sound of their footsteps is still in my ears as they go and return according to the commandment of holy obedience. I have seen them drawing together, that the ways are filled with their thronging. Frenchmen are coming, Spaniards are hastening, Germans and English are running, and a mighty multitude of others are speeding toward us."

They abode in this place, near to the little town of Orte, fifteen days. They were loth to leave and to break away from this experience. It remained with them a gracious and blessed memory. They arose strengthened and spiritually refreshed, feeling the summons of the Master, "Come, follow!"

From this time forth their witness became stronger, and their challenge in greeting, "The Lord give thee peace" (when the country was torn with petty strife, and cities were at war within themselves) more significant. The joy they felt found vivid utterance, that people marvelled. It was something new in religion.

But it is around Francis that the wonder glows. His simple preaching gripped the conscience and transformed the man. His heart was baptised in the great Love. The ego stilled, power more than personal breathes through the human word.

Though he preached to the unlearned in homely language, his words, we read, were yet of wondrous depth. It was not so much in what he actually said, as in the spiritual emotion that escaped through his words, which influenced his hearers so profoundly.

A physician is recorded to have said: "While I easily recall the words of other preachers, those of Francis always seem to escape me. And when I try to commit them to memory they do not seem to me the same as the words which I heard fall from his lips."

About three miles out of Assisi, on the Roman highroad, they found a half ruined cottage, called Rivo Torto, and decided to utilise it as their headquarters. It had the advantages of being near to the Carceri, a series of natural grottoes on the well-wooded slopes of Mount Subasio, whereto the brothers loved to resort, finding ample solitude for spiritual refreshment after labour.

Man's self-giving efforts would lapse, were they not sustained by prayer or contemplation which, though not impossible in the busy mart, is stimulated in a rightful, physical environment. The Carceri were naturally adapted for this purpose; the seclusion, the wildness, the beauty, the proximity to the sphere of labour, made an ideal retreat.

Contemplation and action are both necessary. The one gives point and purpose to the other.

A certain spiritual isolation is necessary to the integrity of the life of the soul. In the words of Emerson, "The soul gives itself, alone, original and pure, to the Lonely, Original and Pure, who, on that condition, gladly inhabits, leads and speaks through it. Then it is glad, young, and nimble. It sees through all things. It calls the light its own, and feels that the grass grows and the stone falls by a law inferior to and dependent on its nature." Neither Martha nor Mary can afford to live separately; they must be of the same household.

Francis loved the solitude. There he enjoyed that privacy of communion that can never be expressed in words. There he renewed his troth with Lady Poverty, putting aside every impediment of thought and feeling till he felt in his heart the pulsing of Love divine. Then was his soul uplifted in ecstasy as he looked upon nature, discerning the deeper Truth that is the life of every living thing, whereby a later kindred poet\* with similar recognition sang that "all life is holy." It surged through him in feeling and rapture. It awakened in

\* William Blake.

him an infinite tenderness, and the realisation of kinship everywhere. All life partook of the Life divine, was fed from the infinite source, had its right place in the divine economy.

“Who could tell,” wrote Celano, “of the sweetness which Francis enjoyed in contemplating in the life of the creatures the wisdom, power, and goodness of the Creator? . . . He would even speak to the flowers as if they understood what he said. And he would approach every manner of creature in an intimate way, calling them by the name of brother or sister. In a manner, of which others have no experience, he discerned the hidden things of creation with an inner perception, even as one who already enjoys the freedom of the children of God.”

From Rivo Torto the brothers went forth throughout Umbria, exhorting the people to penitence and preaching the word as it was given to them. The fact that they lived what they preached was an argument stronger than all eloquence. Bare-footed, bare-headed they went, at first for the most part singly, while they were but few in number, but later two by two.

The news of the Pope's approval spread abroad. In Assisi it created no little excitement, and an eagerness to hear Francis preach. The canons of the Church of St. George offered him their pulpit, but the throng was so great that the bishop suggested the cathedral. And there he preached with authority to his fellow citizens of the love that each should have for all and all for each, and the need for repentance. His tenderest word was on behalf of the poor, the *minores*, who had no social rights. On this and on subsequent occasions he pleaded their cause, proclaimed from the very house-tops the wrongs of which they dared not even whisper, till the civic conscience was awake. His words went home, with the result that they brought peace to the little city it had not known for years. A pact was drawn up between the “*majores*,”

or patricians, and the "*minores*," or plebeians, of Assisi. The preamble to this document, after opening with: "In the name of God, the supernal grace of the Holy Spirit assisting us," sets forth that the statute contained therein establishes a perpetual peace between the Majori and the Minori of Assisi, and forbids all future treaties with papal or imperial legates except by the consent of all the classes in the Commune. The statute contains regulations granting freedom to serfs, and provides for the return of exiles. It was signed and sworn to in the public place of Assisi, the Piazza Minerva, on Wednesday, November 9th, 1210.

During September, in a series of Lenten sermons given in the cathedral between Assumption Day and Michaelmas, he had preached a holy revolution in words of fearless love and of prophetic fire. With great directness and simplicity he unfolded the causes of evil and the springs of human action till his word gripped the heart and the conscience.

On one occasion at least he put on the symbolic covering of sackcloth and ashes, passionately condemning the social evils, but ever turning his plea into the wistful invitation of divine Love. The new Age was dawning, but there is judgment, which also means adjustment, before the rule of God, or the Spirit, begins.

Thus he became regarded as the Father and Protector of the poor.

"While he paid reverence to, and did honour unto all," as we read in the Narrative of the Three Companions, "yet the poor he loved inwardly, yearning toward them with the bowels of compassion."

An incident occurred about this time which greatly increased his influence. The Emperor Otho passed through the district with a large following and much pomp, having come from Germany to be crowned by the Pope at Rome. His arrogant bearing had become a byword.

Although Rivo Torto was close to the highroad by which the Emperor was passing, Francis forbade the brothers to stand by, except one chosen to convey a word to the monarch to remind him of the passing of worldly glory. They pursued their ordinary work as if no unusual event was taking place. And to Francis such was indeed the case. There were only souls to save out of darkness, to be gathered into the kingdom of God's Love. With that imperative, while in courtesy respecting all, he would flatter none. In the gaze of his heart there were no barriers of class nor of caste.

Celano quaintly contrasts the two: Francis, wedded to Poverty, having no possessions, and the Emperor, representing the crown of earthly splendour, yet the man of God taking no notice of the Imperial War Lord.

"Francis," he writes, "dwelling within himself and walking in the amplitude of his heart, was making ready in himself an habitation meet for God, wherefore no outward clamour caught his ears, nor could any sound disturb or interrupt the vast business which he had in hand. The Apostolic authority was strong in him, and therefore he utterly refused to flatter kings and princes. In all ways did he practise simplicity, yet in nowise did he allow the straitness of his abode to cramp the breadth of his heart."

The ruined cottage was indeed a narrow, cramped abode. To make the most of the room "he wrote the names of the brothers on the beams of the hovel, that each might recognise his own place." Nevertheless, the memories of the place are fragrant of pure joy. And among the brothers it was Francis in whom the joy-note was clearest and fullest and most spontaneous. Sometimes in an ecstasy

"he would break into utterance in French, with songs of rapture and joy. Sometimes, as we have seen with our eyes, he would pick up a stick from the ground, and

putting it over his left arm, would draw across it another stick like a bow, which he held in his right hand, as though playing on a viol or other instrument, and with eager motion, would sing in praise of his Lord.’’\*

His radiant presence was the life of the little group.

During the autumn they endured many physical hardships, but they faced adversity with joy and gladness. Did they not know the encompassing Goodness, ever ready to spring to their aid in necessity? Therefore all that came in their experience was a gift to be made the most of, and a means unto a richer and fuller life. The low ground on which the cottage stood was once inundated by floods, that their way was made impassable, and they had to satisfy their hunger with the few roots and mangels they could gather.

Spite of manifold inconveniences, they maintained a high enthusiasm, a spiritual ardour betokening no ordinary little group of men. They were inspired by the example of Francis. The love, so magnetic, that glowed in him was shared by them. It was a happy little community. They enjoyed a rich fellowship one with the other. Their woes, shared in common, were lightened, and quickly dispersed.

“Then” we read, “were they zealous and earnest both in their daily prayer and in working with their hands, keeping far from them that slothfulness which wars against the soul . . . . Then, too, how they cherished one another.”

And how rich their fellowship, in consequence, the writer implies. And in this we have apparently Brother Leo’s own wistful memory and testimony of what once had been.

The heart of Francis was sensitively manifest within the little intimate life of the group. Watchful of the welfare of all the brethren, he made himself servant of all.

Every tendency toward extravagance was corrected and

\* *Speculum*.

balanced by his clear, good sense, and a rich gift of humour that never deserted him. It was sometimes an extravagance in devotion. He would put first things first, and the first thing ever touched the practical issue.

One night, while at Rivo Torto, the little company being at rest, one of the brothers suddenly cried out, "Oh, I am dying!" so that all the others arose at once, startled and amazed. At Francis' word a light was kindled.

"Who is it," he asked, "that cried out, 'I am dying!' "

That brother answered, "It was me, for I am dying of hunger."

Then Francis ordered the table to be laid from their little store, and, lest that brother might be put to shame by eating alone, he himself sat down to eat with him, and at his desire all the other brothers did likewise.

When they had finished the meal, Francis said: "I would have each of you to consider his own nature. One may be able to sustain himself on less food than another. Then let each wisely give to the body what is needful, that it may prove a good servant to the spirit. As we should avoid excess in our eating, in that it is harmful both to soul and body, we should also be careful to avoid a too great abstinence, because God desires mercy and not sacrifice. . . . I wish then that each brother, according to holy Poverty, satisfy his body as it may be necessary for him."

That brother and others newly joining the Order were, indeed, we read, inflicting their bodies beyond measure. Hence the wisdom of these words of Francis.

There is a further story illustrative of his wise and kindly tact, his sensitiveness to another's feelings. Francis noticing that one of the brothers was unwell, "on a certain day rose very early and called that brother privately." Then he led him by the hand to a grape-vine near by, and plucking a bunch of grapes, he bade the friar sit down. And he said:



“Eat of these, dear brother, for they will do you good!” And he himself took of them, lest that brother might feel shame in eating alone. And while they ate the friar was cured, and together they praised the Lord. Never afterwards could that brother recall that memory without deep emotion.

Celano refers to the breadth of the heart of Francis, and his absorption in the vast business which he had in hand. Vast indeed, for it was not less than the fulfilment of his vision of a new humanity. Imaginatively he beheld the dear humanity he loved drawing near to the fount of Reality, finding the ultimate in the present. As he had, so all men might experience. The way was simple and clear, the reward beyond measure wonderful. The vision had but to be seen for people to run towards it. It was the knowing of God within a present experience. And the method: it was to embrace Holy Poverty.

Holy Poverty, as he used that word, had a rich inner content. Its acceptance implied a spiritual preparedness, a purity and singleness of aspiration. The breaking away from the standards of worldly prudence, the voluntary glad surrender of material good through their childlike, confident trust in God's bounty, which feeds the birds and clothes the flowers, was the crossing of the border into the new Age of Spirit. “He that trusteth in God,” said Boehme, “hath continually enough.” No longer anxious for the morrow, the mind is relieved from the compelling absorption of the strife for daily bread.

Up to this time the brothers were known as penitents. One day when they were assembled together one of the group was asked to read the Rule aloud. When he reached the passage “The brethren shall be less than all men”—*et in Minori*—Francis stopped him, and said, “It is my wish, dear brothers, that we take upon ourselves the name, and henceforward be known as *Fratres Minori* (the Brothers Minor.\*)”

\* “The Lesser Brethren,” or even “The Little Brothers,” as he would have expressed it.

The period of their stay at Rivo Torto ended abruptly. While the brothers "were one and all giving themselves up unto silence and prayer," a countryman of the district rudely entered with his ass, driving it before him. "Get well in," he cried to it, "this place will suit us well."

Francis, perceiving the words and purport of the man, was troubled in spirit. He knew instantly that the peasant feared lest they might assume possession.

"I do not think, dear brothers," he said, "that God has called us apart to provide stabling for an ass, nor an inn-parlour for men, but rather that we should preach the way of salvation, and in especial devote ourselves to prayer and praise. Come," he said, "let us go."

He therefore rose at once and left the place, followed by his companions.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE CHURCH OF THE LITTLE PORTION

IT was less the discourtesy of the peasant who so rudely entered than the suggestion of *possession* that made Francis at once leave Rivo Torto. Had he, in fact, though unconsciously, been disloyal to Lady Poverty? His Master had had no place of his own wherein to rest.

Again and again we are made to realise his sensitiveness as to possessions in symbol or in kind. Non-possession, bringing the divine complement "possessing all things," "having nothing, yet having all," in the words of the Apostle, was the very citadel of the strength of the Movement. Fail that and all else fails. It was the kernel of his teaching.

God stood not remote from the world that He had made. His eternal Presence, revealed in Christ, was life's immediate, redeeming, sustaining Fact. It was a truth that had been hidden, "but was now to be revealed through the Order of the Brothers Minor." The Providence of God encompassed "His little ones" with a sustaining care, freeing them from all anxiety "as to what they should eat or what they should drink." They had but to fulfil their part in love and service.

The meaning of the Cross was that God made Himself poor that man might be made rich. It is the story of the Poverty of God. Man could not enter into Life, were it not the very nature of Love to give of itself fully and freely without reservation.

To hold possessions was to be rich on the underside, but to be poor indeed in the greater arch of life. Possessions are the shadow of substance, whereunder the divine radiance is obscured and the warmth of the God-Love chilled. When possessions dropt from him, it was to Francis as if a dark

cloud had passed from his life, and a holy splendour burst full upon him. Thus Holy Poverty was, to him, the passport of man's entry into Life, an intimacy with all that lives.

"Your enjoyment of the world is never right, sang Traherne, in the spirit of St. Francis, "till every morning you awake in heaven, see yourself in your Father's palace, and look upon the skies, the earth and the air as celestial joys. . . . You never enjoy the world aright till the sea itself floweth in your veins, till you are clothed with the heavens, and crowned with the stars, and perceive yourself to be the sole heir of the whole world, and more than so, because men are in it who are every one sole heirs as well as you. Till you can sing and rejoice and delight in God as misers do in gold, and kings in sceptres, you never enjoy the world. You never enjoy the world aright till you see all things so perfectly yours that you cannot desire them any other way, and till you are convinced that all things serve you best in their proper places. . . . God's bounty is so perfect that He giveth all things in the best of manners, making those to whom He giveth so noble, divine and glorious, that they shall enjoy in His similitude. . . . And it more concerneth you . . . than to have possessions of the whole world."

Franciscan poverty is a state, a quality, not a condition. It abides not at the opposite pole to wealth and possessions. The opposite extreme to opulence is penury. They are complementary. But Holy Poverty is central, not extreme. The one is apparent good, the other apparent ill, actual in human experience. The third is different; it is a state that is poised in the Reality, is the free, open condition through which the Divine circulation flows in blessing unto all. Where it is realised there truly is an approach unto God, through which the saving health and wealth of God has access unto man.

Had the peasant not precipitated their leave-taking, the growth of the little group would have made it desirable to

seek a more suitable meeting place, having regard to future expansion, and where if possible there might be a little chapel.

A request made to the Bishop of Assisi met with no success. A speedy response, however, came through the Abbot of the Benedictines on Mount Subasio, who freely offered the little chapel of Santa Maria degli Angeli (St. Mary of the Angels), known chiefly as the Portiuncula, or "the Church of the little Portion." This Francis and all the brothers accepted with great joy as an answer to their prayer. And in return "yearly did Francis offer to the Abbot, in fee for this priceless gift, a netful of fish and a measure of oil."\*

How marvellously, once more, had God responded to their need. "It must be so," Francis felt, and "it was so," came the answer of wonderful experience.

No more acceptable place could possibly have been chosen. As we have seen, it was one of the chapels that Francis had restored, prayerfully laying stone on stone with his own hands. The very name, the Portiuncula, "the Chapel of the little Portion," bore for him a special significance. His heart outwelled in gratitude.

The brothers eagerly repaired thither, and around the little chapel they built tiny dwellings of wattles plastered with mud and thatched, eloquent of poverty and simplicity. Their cloister was the forest, which at that time spread all around, lending to the little chapel a special quiet and seclusion, that people in the early Christian ages might well have imagined it was visited by the angels.

In three or four days it was all done, and Francis was delighted beyond measure, the song of joy and gladness continually breaking from his lips. So deep indeed was that ecstasy that to contain himself he had to go alone into the forest cloisters and pour out his soul in prayer and praise.

It was all Franciscan in the truest sense. It became endeared

\* Thus while it was made secure for them it would yet never be possessed.

to them all, especially to Francis. There was no other place quite the same.

Though he knew the Kingdom of God was set in every place, and that where the elect were the heavenly grace never was absent, of all places on earth there was one more rich, one more sweet, and this place was St. Mary of the Angels. More rich indeed the grace, and more frequented by holy visitations of celestial spirits. For this reason in later years he would say, "See! Oh my sons! that you never leave this place," sometimes adding, "if you are thrown out on one side, enter by another, for it is sacred. Here when we were few we were made many; here He gave of His heavenly wisdom to His poor little ones, and kindled our wills in the fire of Love."\*

From this time the Order underwent rapid expansion. Young men from all classes came thronging in. Generally they were of the peasant and artisan class, yet not always. Francis met some with gentle dissuasion, perceiving that they were not ready. "Go back awhile, and consider," he said, "and if you return, let it be by the Lord's guidance, and not your own caprice."

"The "exhortation to penitence" recommended to the brothers was very simple yet practical. It came as a revelation to many, sounding as it did for the first time to ears that were familiar only with the current preaching, that was at once complicated, mysterious and superstitious. It could be understood by simple people.

The next ten years were the great years of the Order, the "heroic years" it has well been said. It was under Francis' personal leadership, and was amazingly free and spontaneous. His spirit was reflected in the brothers, and his ideal shone out unmistakably clear. He sought a personal touching with each one. They caught fire from his words, eagerness from his spirit.

\* *Speculum.*

At first they did not go far afield, but with the increase in their numbers during that period, they had not merely evangelised Umbria, but had penetrated all Italy, and had sent missions far afield, not merely to the Christian lands, but to the Saracens.

The last word in the ear of a brother as he set out on a mission journey would be that of Francis himself, who, after all had assembled to wish an affectionate God-speed, would say: "Cast all your care upon the Lord, dear brother, and He will sustain you."

The loving fellowship of the brothers at Portiuncula during the first few years soon became legendary, that friars of later days have looked back to that time, and have sighed, "O that it might be once again."

The woodland cloisters befitted such a fellowship. There the brothers met and conversed. There under the great trees they found courage and solace as oftentimes arm in arm they walked, sharing their experiences with one another.

There they gathered around Francis and listened to his teaching. He spoke to many as he spoke to one, intimate-wise and heart to heart, as in conversation. His speech was animated and sincere, rich and warm with his loving thoughts.

"We have no right to receive a gift," he said, "unless we make a richer return. Therefore we should fill our time with all manner of good works."

"But when our hands are empty and our need demands, how may we make such a return for the alms-gift we receive?" they answered.

And he taught them of the Love of God, the greatest gift. It was their privilege to convey the Love of God to their brethren. It was the rich meaning behind their preaching and their life. Attuned to His Spirit, they were enabled to give of it in blessing. It was a living power and must be held sacred. Therefore an alms-gift received in return is holy and sacramental, and richest and sweetest. It is God's gift to

us. It belongs to the Lord's Table, around which "gather the angels; yes, and the little birds and all living things which neither reap nor gather into barns."

As in his own case so was it with his disciples at the beginning. It was only with difficulty they could bring themselves to beg for alms.

And therefore had he said, "Beloved, be not ashamed to go, for this is the heritage which our Lord acquired and left to us and all who wish to live by his example in holy poverty. . . .

"Go, confidently and gladly, conscious of God's blessing;

"Go, eagerly, as he who in return for one small piece of money would offer one hundred pence, since when you ask alms saying, 'Do us an alms-deed for the Love of God,' you offer and convey God's Love, in comparison with which heaven and earth are nought.' . . .

And so it was when each returned with the gifts they had found, each of them showed to Francis the alms he had collected, and they said to one another joyously, "See, I have received more than you," at which Francis rejoiced, seeing them so merry and jocund. And from that time forward each more willingly sought leave to go for alms.

In later times the Order became known as the "begging Brotherhood," and the earliest of the biographers, Celano, writes: "a lament before God for the idleness and gluttony of the friars." Then the sacrament of alms-receiving was lost, its meaning void. Had he again walked among them, we can imagine Francis saying sternly: "The Table of the Lord must be made clean, therefore by holy obedience, no brother henceforth may supplicate an alms, but all must labour with their hands to meet their daily need, and when that fail, let them wait upon the Lord, asking of no man."

"God cannot abide the idle or the lukewarm," he used to say; and giving the brothers his example he "laboured



humbly with his hands, permitting nothing of the best gifts of time to flow to waste."

"I wish each to labour and be engaged in good works," he said, "in order that we be not burdensome to others, and that neither heart nor tongue should wander idly. But let those who have no craft learn one."

They did not barter their labour, only desiring sufficient return for their daily need, seeking to fulfil the word of Christ, "Take no thought for the morrow." But mostly their labour was freely given unto the Church of God and unto the poor.

One form of service specially set apart was in ministry among the lepers. Francis ever had a special place in his heart for these unfortunates.

The following story from the *Fioretti* is legendary of that loving service.

Once when the brothers were ministering in a leper hospital near where Francis abode, a leper was there, so impatient and perverse that all thought him possessed of the devil. And so it was, for not merely did he assail with blows and curses those who did him service, but was blasphemous to such a degree that at length there was not any who could endure or was willing to serve him. For while the brothers bore with patience both insult and injury unto themselves, they could not bear to listen to his words of blasphemy. They resolved therefore to abandon him, after first relating the matter to St. Francis.

When they told him of these things, Francis went himself to this leper so perverse, and coming near to him he saluted him, "God give you peace, my brother most dear."

"What peace may I have of God," answered the leper, "for has He not taken away my peace—yes, and all good things, and left me thus, altogether stinking and rotten."

"My little son, have patience," said Francis, "for the infirmities of the body are given by God in this world for the salvation of souls, seeing that they are of great merit when borne patiently."

"How can I," replied the sick man, "bear with patience the continual pain which racks me night and day? For not only am I afflicted with my infirmity, but the brothers you have given to attend to me only aggravate my trouble and do not serve me as they should."

Francis perceiving that this leper was indeed possessed by the spirit of evil, went aside to pray, interceding for him. Then, returning to him, he said, "My son, I will myself serve you, seeing that you are not content with the others."

"I am willing," answered the leper; "but what can you do more than these others?"

"I am ready to do whatever you wish," replied Francis.

"Then," said the leper, "it is my wish that you wash me all over, for the smell of my body is so offensive that I cannot abide myself."

Thereupon Francis quickly prepared some boiling water, with many sweet-smelling herbs, then stripped him and began to wash him with his own hands, and another brother poured out the water. And it came to pass by a divine miracle, that wheresoever Francis touched him with his holy hands the leprosy departed and the flesh became perfectly whole. And as the flesh began to heal, even so his soul began to be healed also. For the leper, made aware that his body was being cured, became chastened in spirit and most bitterly began to lament. And as his body was being cleansed by the washing of the water so his mind within was cleansed by repentance and by tears. And being made every whit whole, both in body and soul, he humbly confessed his sin, crying, "Woe is me! who am worthy of hell for my base ingratitude, my impatience and my blasphemies."

## CHAPTER VII

### THE GLAD COMPANIONSHIP

THE message of Francis was like a song of joy falling into the midst of a world of sorrow. It was the breaking of a spell. And to those who heard and responded it was a breath of freedom, a release inexpressible. "The whole country trembled," wrote Celano. "The barren land was already covered with a rich harvest, the withered vine began again to blossom."

And thus it came about that the common people, knowing that the friars were at hand, would greet them with eager welcome, for they brought joy with them. Religion and sorrow had long been associated, but here was religion and joy in wedlock, a blithe comradeship. It was like a new discovery.

"Where," said Francis, "is the evidence of religion without gladness of spirit?" He would therefore gently reprove the melancholy spirit.

"Keep," he would say, "your sadness secret to yourself and to God, and pray of His mercy to restore to your soul the gladness of His salvation, which is taken away on account of sin; but before others study always to be joyful, for it does not befit the servant of God to show a troubled face."

"For a glad countenance denotes a fervour of spirit, and an earnest occupation in good works."

"Gladness in the deed attracts to the action even more than the deed itself."

"If the servant of God would study to preserve inwardly

and outwardly that spiritual joy which comes from cleanness of heart and devoutness of prayer, no harm can touch him. Let us therefore strive to attain this joy to the encouragement of our neighbours and to the reproach of the enemy, to whom indeed it pertaineth to grow sad, but to you ever to rejoice and be glad in the Lord."

Thus a spirit of gladness should characterise the Brother Minor.

And as he said later: "What are the servants of the Lord but His minstrels, who should raise the hearts of men and move them to spiritual joy?"

Why should they not be glad, for the kingdom of God was not merely a future and post-mortem actuality. It was an immediate consciousness, a present realisation. Thus Francis, following his Master, preached the kingdom of heaven not afar off, but at hand—not a doctrine, but a realisation. Indeed in such fellowship was heaven itself.

Life was rich and vivid in the very present. Realising Goodness so close, he saw as in imagination the portals of earth and heaven open wide to the little child Humanity. The consciousness of God's Presence was the one living fact of his life. In his vision of Love, his childlike consciousness of the intimate presence, he perceived with eyes bathed in wonder and compassion the Lover and the loved everywhere, all living things waiting the reminding magic Word by which they at once enter their true condition.

He saw mankind toiling and moiling, suffering and sinning by reason of a great apostasy severing them from the heaven of God's Love and His immeasurable riches. The taproot was the reliance upon an outward good and deadness to the Source of all. Divine goodness, a living stream of wealth, had been diverted by human greed. Man's grasp of possessions he truly felt, wards off the Love of God.

The past had burned itself into the soul of Francis, and th

symbol of money stood out in a flaming image as, to use Sabatier's strong expression, "the very sacrament of evil." It represented a false relationship between man and man. He execrated it, saw it as an unclean thing. "Do not touch it," he said. "Not merely 'the love of money is the root of all evil'; the thing itself," he said, "is polluted."

By word and example he urged his brethren to flee it as it were the devil. "For this maxim had been given by him to the friars, that they should measure with one price of love, dung and money."

It perpetuates a false standard of values, for its possession or the lack thereof signifies the good and evil of the world, in the circulation of which the poor are victimised. Power flows to the wealthy, but penury to the poor.\*

And yet the medium of exchange is not itself an evil; it is rendered evil by false valuations. At the same time, while these prevail it is in a manner its very life-blood. The medium, however, is not immoral, it is non-moral. If good were behind, good would doubtless ensue.

Given a humanity living at the altitude of life in touch with the realities, recognising personal good in the good of the neighbour and the welfare of all, knowing the joy of service, and the secret of life in giving of one's best without seeking a return, there would be no need of a system of exchange at all, for each would give freely of what he produces, and the principle of Love would operate in good will to all.

The brothers, practising this ideal of not bartering their labour, but rendering the freest and fullest service without thought of a return, making each day sufficient unto itself, waiting in faith on the goodness of God for their full supply, had no use for money.

\* Therefore, Francis urged, we are in debt to the poor, and to those in need we can but give back what is truly their own.

Brother Giles was typical of the early Franciscan, desiring ever to live by the work of his hands.

We read how once when in Rome he did after this wise. First, with earnest devotion, he attended the early morning Mass, after which he went forth humbly, joyfully, prayerfully, in the manner of a Brother Minor, ready to help in whatever service came to him to do. Sometimes he made his way to a wood, eight miles distant, where he gathered sticks, making them into a bundle that he could carry on his shoulders; then he would return to the convent where he was staying, and would give of them in exchange for his food.

On one occasion a woman wished to buy his wood, and at once agreeing to her price he carried it to her house. But when she saw that he was a friar she wished to give him more than she had promised. Yet lest he should be overcome by greed, not only would he take no more than the sum that had been fixed, but left half of it in the woman's hands, and went his way.

Sometimes he would help the labourers gather the olives or strip the vines, And on one occasion when a man wanted his walnuts beaten, and no one would do it because the place was far off and the tree difficult to climb, we read that Giles stepped forward, and said, "My friend, if you will give me part of the walnuts I will come with you and beat them." This was agreed upon. But when he saw the tree his heart nearly failed him for fear. Nevertheless first making the sign of the Cross, he climbed it and successfully beat it. Then he found that the share which fell to him was so large that he could not carry it in his lap. So he took off his habit, and tying the sleeves and the hood together, he made a sack of it, which he filled with the nuts, and with it on his back he returned to Rome, when with great joy he gave them all to the poor, for the love of God.

In the harvest time he would go with other poor folk to glean the ears of corn, yet if one, seeing that he was a friar,

would offer him a sheaf, he would answer, "My brother, I have no granary in which to store it." And even of what he gleaned he gave to the poor.

Yet he rarely bound himself for a whole day, in order that he might keep a time for prayer and contemplation. Indeed, he would never bind himself except on the understanding that he might have time to meditate.

Once while in Ancona he made baskets of rushes, and sold them, not for money, but for food for himself and his companions. Only in necessity would he turn to the Table of the Lord, begging alms from door to door.

Francis would have the brothers continually keep in mind that their mission was not separate from their life; that the living of the life was in itself the fulfilment of the mission. Their message was not to inculcate a doctrine, but to commend their way of life. And it was that they should be wedded to Lady Poverty, expressing that relationship in every thought and action.

"Journey forth," said Francis, "two by two, humble and gentle, keeping silence until after tierce, communing with God in your hearts, avoiding every useless word. Meditate as you would if in your cell, for wherever we are and wherever we go, we carry our cell with us. Brother Body is our cell, and our soul the hermit dwelling therein to pray to the Lord and meditate."

And thus the brothers journeyed quietly or in helpful and happy conversation, "redeeming the time," ready to serve at all times as occasion prompted.

"Their concord and glad looks, wonder and love,  
And sweet regard gave birth to holy thoughts."†

\* "If thou doest the good thou understandest, thou shalt enter into the good thou understandest not."—*Brother Giles*.

† Dante.

About this time two brothers entered the Order, the stories of whom illustrate the simplicity of the early days of the Movement. One was Ginepro (Brother Juniper), fervent and selfless, yet simple to the degree of foolishness, of whom innumerable anecdotes are related, in which he appears in a ridiculous light while yet disclosing a heart of gold. Francis while stirred to merriment could yet exclaim earnestly: "I would I had a forest of such junipers."

The other was a poor peasant (Brother John) who entered a chapel one time while Francis was sweeping it.

"Brother, give me the broom that I may help you," he said, and taking the broom he swept it through. Then sitting down with Francis, he said, "Brother, I have long desired to serve God, especially when I heard speak of you. I did not know where to find you. Now that it has pleased God that I should see you, I am ready to do whatever you may command me."

Francis, seeing his fervour, was filled with joy . . . and he said, "Brother, if you would be of our life and society you must renounce all possessions and give to the poor according to the Gospel counsel, even as the other brethren."

Such was his simplicity that at first he imagined that he was bound to do all things that Francis did. He watched his every act and gesture. And so, if Francis bent his knees, lifted his hands or sighed, he himself did all these things in like manner. Which, when Francis noticed, he with much humour reproved him. But he answered, "I promised perfect obedience and to conform to you in all things." At which simple answer Francis was filled with wonder and gladness, beholding in him such simplicity and purity.

Between the years 1212 and 1216 Francis journeyed incessantly, always returning to Assisi for the Chapters of the Order. Wherever he went, according to Celano, people of all



classes, noble and gentle as well as the simple, scholar as well as the unlearned, priest as well as layman, men renowned and men obscure, eagerly came forward to join the brothers. It is said of Francis that a simple word or even a look from him would sometimes draw men to his side in a very passion of surrender and loving response.

The Order had no subsequent leader like Francis. His was a spiritual, rather than an authoritative, directing. Its power sprang from the quality of his love. With wise and exquisite tact he directed the now rapidly expanding Order, consisting of men of every rank, character, temperament, "infusing into their hearts his own pure and saintly spirit." Above all he never spared himself, but set an example of perfect self-sacrifice and devotion. His every energy centred in the work. With heart and hand, by day, by night, he gave himself to it, in "ceaseless fervour for the welfare of souls and the good of the Order." It was a full glad devotion, a chivalry of the spirit.

So eager was he on his errands of love, that, spite of his frail body, he would oftentimes outstrip his companion; then would he await his fellow with a word not untouched with merriment, a human trait largely lost in the solemnity of the narrative, but which, spite of it, sometimes leaps from the context and pulses as from a living heart.

Not Francis alone, but the brothers as a whole, had that eagerness of service. With quick, light step they went on their way, every now and then breaking into the glad song of praise. It was this joy of heart and intensity of service that drew forth such a hearty reception and gathered so many into their ranks.

While the child of his age, the wonder is that Francis was so free from the accepted thought and the emotional handicaps of his time. He lived from the heart rather than from the mind, not in a shallow, emotional way, but in a deep, compassionate, loving way. He did not question, but he

lived beyond many of the age-beliefs. At no point is this more clear than in his feeling toward nature and the physical life around; his love for every living thing. In the touching of the outward he felt a lover's rapture. All life drew together in intimate relationship. So he familiarly spoke of brother sun, our sister the moon, brother wind, sister water, our brothers and sisters the animals and birds and flowers. He would lift a worm from the path lest a careless foot should crush it. He would entice his little sister grasshopper to perch in his hand and listen to its chirping. He made it a rule that the friars where they settled should have a piece of ground set apart from the rest. They were to grow vegetables and useful plants, but must always reserve "one corner of good ground for our little sisters the flowers and sweet herbs." It was, as Sabatier declares, the one luxury he not merely allowed, but insisted upon.

The human body was not vile in his eyes; it was "brother Body"; his own body he sometimes half humorously, half sadly called "brother ass." Nevertheless, the very expression indicates a far advance upon the general conception in his day.

He fed sparingly, and to avoid delicacy sometimes sprinkled wood ash over his food. "Brother Ash is pure," he said.

He was indeed poet in his love of nature and apprehension of the beautiful; he was mystic in his perception of a holy beauty beneath the form, and one loved of God beneath an apparent ugliness.

## CHAPTER VIII

### LADY CLARE

**T**HE little Brotherhood may be said to have truly found its feet at the Portiuncula. It had now become widely recognised and accepted. The difficulties incident to the earlier stages had been surmounted. The early persecutions had died down, having always been met by imperturbable good will. Ridicule changed to appreciation as the common people became aware that they had a champion in Francis. The Order, in fact, was becoming popular, and in this regard lay a severer test.

The message of Francis, so persuasively preached, the sheer joy of it, with its challenge and its invitation, thrilled the listener. He pictured the new Life, glad, free, exulting, made possible through the simple practice of the religion of Jesus, in the pattern of the Sermon on the Mount.

Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.

Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.

"Gospel-perfection," he called it. A perfect society is possible if we truly love one another. It will joyfully express in our giving of our best in mutual service and in not holding to any separate, personal good. Then life would be in close touch with the reality, a perpetual sacrament. He called it holy poverty, source of richest joy, of truest wealth.

People flocked to hear him, men and women. Young men

and young women listened in rapt attention. They welcomed the message with joy, for it cast new light upon their way, with meaning they had never imagined. It was dynamic and revolutionary in their life; it was a word fraught with power.

To the young man the Order was itself the open door unto the realisation of this new idealism. He would find full scope therein for his spiritual ardour. To the young woman desiring the new life his eager message threw out a vision of hope. Was there room in the Order that women also might take their part in the beginnings of the new society? It was a problem solved in bold simplicity. Had Francis been less simple he might have hesitated.

A year had scarcely gone by when the matter was brought to the issue. Clara, or Clare, to use the homely English, a young woman of noble birth, had heard Francis preach, and her heart was kindled by his burning words. He had articulated what she long had brooded upon. In a flash the vision came to her and its full meaning, and from that moment her life was dedicated. She measured it in herself not less fully than he.

Her entrance was as dramatic as his own. She came to him and, with the boldness of a great self-surrender, offered herself so earnestly that the recognition and acceptance of poverty on her part was met by a frank and free admission on his. It was the touching of two kindred souls. In the contact there was warmth and light. But one word, it was enough, and they understood each other fully. At once they came to the central point, and their converse was a communion in the ideal. We may imagine something of that interview.

"Brother Francis, is the new life that you preach for each and all, for rich and poor, for man and woman?"

"Yes, my sister!"

"Does your Order provide for this new life? Is it in itself the beginning and commencement of the better society?"

"Yes, it is my hope it will indeed bring in the Age of Spirit and the kingdom of God!"

"Then, brother, the Order must widen to admit women as well as men."

And then she opened all her heart to him. "I also would enter," she said.

At that moment was born the complementary half of the Order, afterwards known as *The Clarisses*, "The Order of Poor Ladies." There was no longer a question of her joining the Order: she was necessary to it.

They knelt together, looked into the future with glowing vision, dwelling on it in wonder and love. They considered the difficulties in the way, the persecution her action would give rise to, the opposition and prevention if she first made her decision known. He presented to her the contrast between the old and the new way of life, and the hardship it would entail.

She looked at him gently. He, too, had been delicately nurtured. "Are there not other compensations?" she said. A heavenly benediction breathed upon them, and every doubt passed away.

The picture of Clare, the lovely daughter of Count Scefi, in her becoming attire, approaching Francis, the latter bare-footed and meanly clad, has often been dwelt upon. To neither, however, did that outward contrast signify anything at all.

Clare had realised how incomplete the message was if it could be applied only by men, for it was not merely a doctrinal evangel, but the presentation of a life, a call to a present practice of a new and holier society.

"It was ordained," Francis had said, "for those 'little ones of God' of whom Jesus spake when he said, 'Unto you belongs the kingdom.'"

Francis apprehended the truth of Clare's words the moment

her coming brought it before him. He therefore took the brave step of admitting her, in the teeth of much current opinion and prejudice. The accepted thought, reflected in Church and State, was against such an action. Cognisant of that, yet innocent of outward authority, he obeyed the strong inner prompting. Simply and directly did he receive her, and as he, so all the brethren welcomed her coming with great joy. It was like "the coming of a bride," so deep the significance felt. And, indeed, from this time, for it was a spiritual event, the Order sprang forward into a greater and more comprehensive activity. Hitherto their labours had been almost entirely confined to Umbria, and in particular the country round about Assisi. They were speedily to penetrate throughout the whole of Italy.

Brave as was Francis' action in admitting Clare, that of Clare herself was sheer heroic, a spirit not incompatible with a disposition unusually thoughtful and gentle. Her early biographers dwell especially upon her gentleness. A Franciscan writes that she was born with a sweet smile upon her lips.

It was arranged that on the night between Palm Sunday and Holy Monday (March 18-19, 1212), Clare, having sought but failed to obtain her parents' consent, should secretly leave her home, and in the company of two friends set forth for the Portiuncula, where Francis would await her. They came "by country roads lighted by the Paschal moon . . . and now, as they approached, torches flickered in the gloom," and a song of praise fell upon their ears "as Francis, followed by all his brethren, came out to meet their sister."

They led her to the little chapel, and in this humble sanctuary of the brothers Clare made her solemn religious profession. Francis read the simple Rule adapted from the words of Jesus, and Clare, in the presence of all, dedicated herself to its full practice and obedience. Her hair was shorn, and then Francis gave her the habit or tunic of the Order and the veil of penitence.

One may but imagine the indescribable emotion she would feel at the sight of her beautiful hair lying where it fell, with the realisation it brought, that her old life was severed for ever and the new life commenced in very deed. We picture Francis gently lifting it in his own hands and placing it before the altar ere it was given to brother fire to be consumed.

Well was it that her whole heart was in the action, for she knew only too surely the bitter persecution she would encounter. She had dared to exercise a freedom of judgment.

The ceremony concluded, he placed the young novice under the care of the Benedictine nuns of San Paolo. To this convent came, next day, her parents, deeply angered, who with tears and entreaties, even with threats, implored her to renounce the religious life and return home. Her attitude, warm with affection though her words were, was so firm and steadfast to her vow that they desisted from their endeavours and sorrowfully took their leave. She, clinging to the altar, had claimed sanctuary. What may have followed is a matter of surmise, for in less than a fortnight she had left this convent for another that was more secluded.

It was not long before she was joined by others, including her own sister Agnes. It was, therefore, desirable that they should have a retreat of their own, where they might freely practise the Rule, and be in close touch with the Brotherhood. Francis therefore applied to the friendly Abbot of the Benedictines, who again responded, and to his great joy granted him the little chapel of St. Damian. It was duly prepared, and the little sisters placed there. As yet there were but two or three, but the new Order of sisters thus initiated through Francis' simple but chivalrous action was to spread with equal rapidity to that of the brothers.

After this example other groups formed, till wherever the Movement reached the quiet ministry of the sisters aided and supplemented the active service of the brothers.

How deep Clare's feelings must have been as she stepped

into the little sanctuary now made ready for her, "trembling with emotion" at the thought of all that it would mean. It was as a bride entering her new home, in a very heavenly sense. For the place was holy, and she was the handmaid of the Lord. The very stones were sacred. Here Christ had revealed his mission to Francis and the Movement had had its birth. Now it was to be dedicated to prayer and praise.

On her entry, Francis gave to Clare the Rule for the Sisterhood. It is probable that it was the same as that of the Brothers, with the omission of that portion respecting the missionary life. The brothers by their labour or by alms were to supply the needs of the sisters, who in return, tending the sick, spinning and weaving, would render what service they were able. One work of love which Clare set herself to do was to spin thread, and with it to embroider altar cloths and vestments for the poor churches, of which there were many.

Clare prepared with her own hands a tiny garden, which she loved to tend. Here she cultivated her "roses and carnations, her lavender and rosemary with other sweet herbs." From here they could watch the peasants tilling the fields, and discern but a mile or two away the woodland cloisters of the little Portiuncula.

Thus was initiated what is known as the second Order. Like unto the first, it came about through the simple pointing of circumstances, and in nowise was due to premeditation.

Later still was founded, by a like necessity, the Tertiary, or Third Order, for those who accepted in principle, and practised, Franciscanism, but for obvious reasons could not follow the active evangelical or the purely contemplative life.

That the founding of the second Order should take place without ecclesiastical or civic interference speaks volumes for the influence of Francis. "He, a simple layman, assumed the right to receive the vows of Clare and admit her without the briefest novitiate."

Though a later age sought to cover it, it is abundantly



evident that the mutual relations of brothers and sisters were at first both free and cordial.

Clare one day having a great desire to "break bread" with Francis, God put it into his heart to invite her once again to see St. Mary of the Angels, knowing what a joy this would give her, for it was here that she became the bride of Christ. And, he thought, she has now been a long time shut up at St. Damian's. And so, with one companion, she came, escorted by the brothers whom he had sent.

And it is related that the discourse which they had was so wonderful that the heavenly grace descended, and the little company were all caught up into an ecstasy. Moreover, while they were thus wrapt in God, runs the old narrative, the people of Assisi and Bettona and the country around noticed that St. Mary and the surrounding wood was lit up as if on fire, and came hastily to the spot to lend their aid. But, coming close and finding no fire at all, they marvelled, and entering quietly saw Francis and Clare and the little company seated around the humble table wrapt in contemplation of God.

At length Clare, greatly consoled and "escorted well," returned to St. Damian. And the sisters, when she arrived, were filled with joy, for they had feared lest Francis might have sent her to rule some other convent. For he had said to her: "Be ready, if at any time it be needful to send you to some other home"; and she, "as a daughter of holy obedience," had made answer: "I am at all times ready to go wherever you may send me."

The brothers conducting missions were now empowered to receive sisters in the same way as they received brothers into the Order. That any should be accepted without novitiate into the full privilege of the Order brought upon Francis the censure and criticism of other religious bodies and, more guardedly, the Church authorities. To the persistent challenge on this point Francis gave the simple answer that the full

surrender of possessions and acceptance of poverty was in itself ample testimony of the convert's good faith. It was an unanswerable argument, and Francis stood secure on his ground till his central position was shaken by disloyalty within the Order itself.

The action of full surrender of possessions and the acceptance of poverty in itself implied a consciousness that was made ready for the new society. He would throw wide the doors and, in the words of Christ in His parable, would seek through the highways and byways and constrain the poor to come in. It was Christ's own charge.

It seemed to him that to give way here would mean to give way upon other points as well, and instead of the Order being a Door unto the new society, the practice of the kingdom of God, it would lose that rich meaning and become stereotyped and but one among the other orders of the Church, the difference being only in degree.

In general regard, then as now, the religious life was considered separate from the secular life, and quite distinct from it. Francis blended the two on a higher level. He affirmed that the two essentially were one, for to live truly was to be religious. All living things had their part and true life in religion. Religion is not discipline or ceremony or mental acceptance of a creed. These may be an approach to it. It is to be spiritually *alive*. Francis did not undervalue the religious rite, but saw with pain that the means to the end was oft-times regarded as the end in itself.

As he for the Brotherhood, so Clare had to contend equally on behalf of the Sisterhood for the ideal. Throughout her long life — for she survived Francis twenty-seven years — patiently and bravely she strove for it, yet always with a courtesy that evoked both affection and admiration.

Though "she ever desired to obey and not to command," her sweet, tactful wisdom, her gentle manner, her love ever forgetful of self, gave her the lead among the sisters no less

unquestionable than that of Francis himself. From time to time she proved his wise counsellor, his guardian angel. If for a moment he doubted his mission, it was she who restored his courage and high purpose.

The attitude of the Church is well represented in the person of Cardinal Ugolini Conti, afterwards Pope Gregory IX, dear friend both to Francis and to Clare. He was moved to enthusiasm at the sight of the renewal of the apostolic life in the experience of Francis. He marvelled at his clear, penetrating grasp of spiritual truth, his discernment of inner meanings behind outward facts. He understood not the source of it. Yet what he saw he loved, and to the extent of his power afforded them a generous protection. But he desired that the Order should be active under the Church's direction and control.

Ugolini regarded the Movement from the angle of the Church, and his desire was to utilise it for the purpose of the Church. A strong man and well intentioned to a degree, his one thought was the Church, and his purpose was to carry on the policy of Innocent III, and make it supreme arbiter among the nations.

He was keenly alive to the abuses within its walls, and the urgent need for reformation, and welcomed the two new religious Orders (that of Dominic and of Francis) as a means whereby this might be carried out. He did not, as Francis, see the stream of pure religion flowing into the haven of the kingdom of God on earth, finding expression in a purified society, in the lives of the Minores (the less than the least) of the spirit.

He sought to confer privileges which Francis zealously refused to accept.

Both Francis and Clare were sensitive to the trend of things. They foresaw an increasing difficulty in maintaining their central position, and therefore took precautions before-

hand to establish it.\* The foundation principle was, as we have seen, the holy poverty consciousness, that relaxing of the hold upon possessions which opens the soul to the greater good, both in this world and the world to come. It draws the divine into the present: the present moment which, truly realised, is overflowing with God and good.

Francis would fain have believed that Ugolini was with him in spirit and desire, if not wholly in thought. Clare harboured no such illusion, but discerned an ultimate wide divergence in his attitude.

We read how, in 1228, Ugolini, now Pope Gregory, on his way to Assisi to prepare for the canonisation of St. Francis, turned aside to visit Clare, which he ever loved to do. Telling her of his sadness owing to the prevailing unrest, in that strife had broken out between the partisans of the Papacy and of the Emperor, he urged the wisdom of her relaxing the vow of poverty, and offered the security of certain lands in order to free them from all anxiety.

"If it is your vow which prevents this we will release you from it," he said. Clare looked at him in astonishment.

"Holy Father," she said, "absolve me from my sins. I have no desire for a dispensation from following Christ."

He had failed to recognise the depth of her originality in that same vision which inspired Francis. To her, as to him, it was the very mandate of Christ.

There is still extant an autographed letter to Clare from Pope Gregory, then eighty years of age. It begins:

"To his beloved daughter in Jesus Christ, Clare, Abbess, . . . Gregory sends greeting and peace."

Then he commends himself and his work to the prayers of the little community, that God may have pity upon him in the midst of the snares and difficulties surrounding him. A few

\* She obtained from Pope Innocent III the privilege of perpetual poverty, a request so original that he wrote the first few lines in his own hand.

words of encouragement follow to "his daughter specially beloved," to endure patiently unto the end, continuing steadfast in prayer, . . . adding how deeply he is conscious of her sympathy in the midst of his sorrows.

There is a charming story in the *Fioretti*, how on one occasion the Holy Father came to visit Clare and to commune with her upon things sacred and divine. Then, even as they discoursed, Clare made the tables ready and set bread thereon. And she desired the Holy Father to bless it. But the Pope replied: "Sister Clare, I want you now to bless this bread by making the sign of the cross of Christ, to whom you have wholly given yourself."

But Clare answered: "Who am I to do this before the Vicar of Christ—I, a poor ignorant woman?"

"Then, that it should not be felt as presumption, but rather as obedience," replied the Pope, "I command you by holy obedience now to do this, and with this holy sign bless the bread in the name of God."

Then Clare, as a true daughter of obedience, devoutly blessed the loaves with the sign of the holy cross, and then, to their amazement and wonder, upon those loaves appeared the very sign that she had made, impressed most clear to see. And of these loaves part were eaten, but part, because of the miracle, were kept.

And the Holy Father, deeply moved by what he saw, departed, giving thanks to God.

While Clare lived St. Damian was one of the few places which maintained the freshness of the early days. Giles, Leo, Ruffino, Masseo, Juniper, Angelo—names made familiar in the legend, and others, lovers of poverty, were her ever-welcome guests. In this way she strove to retain the first rich and happy fellowship.

A famous English friar, a doctor of theology, once preached at St. Damian's, Brother Giles also being present. In the midst of his discourse Giles, though but a layman, suddenly called

out: "Stay a moment, brother, and let me say a word!" whereupon the preacher, humbly making the sign of obedience, sat down to listen to Giles.

The incident rejoiced Clare, for it seemed to her that she was living in the old days again.

For years had she gently contended for the return of the first important privilege, so urgent in her vision, for her Order ever to remain free from possessions, a privilege which had been withdrawn, except at St. Damian's. And now at length, even on her death-bed, it was granted, for the Pope himself (Innocent IV) came in person with the decree, signed by himself, which established it for all time. Thus her passing was made supremely happy.

Standing by her bedside, the Pope, at her earnest request, gave her plenary absolution for all her sins.

"Would to God, sister," he cried, with tears in his eyes as he complied with her humble petition, "that my soul had the small need that yours has for this last absolution."

The little gathering of friends was kept up unto the end, and she had the consolation of having them with her in her last hours.

Among the others, Juniper came with tears in his eyes to bid her a last farewell, and Clare, receiving with a smile him whom she named *giocoliere di Dio* (lit. "a plaything of God"), whispered: "Brother Juniper, hast thou not some good news to tell me of our God?" She died radiantly, August 12, 1253.

Celano speaks of St. Damian under Clare's ruling as a garden "jewelled with flowers, a bower from whence was diffused a most sweet perfume of holy living."

Assisi was a better place for Clare being there. From the little sanctuary there breathed a very exhalation of purity, affecting as a sweet and gracious influence even the chance passer-by.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE GREAT EVANGEL

**T**HE energy of the Movement sprang from Francis himself. In the freedom of those early days his spirit was aflame with love and irresistibly joyous. The brothers drank from the font of his inspiration. With an infinite solicitude he sought to keep a close personal touch with them all. It was simple enough at first. But with the increase of the fellowship it was natural that there should be certain set occasions for their coming together.

These meetings were more or less informal and wholly joyous. From 1216 they were regularised and became known as Chapters-general, being fixed twice in the year, respectively at Whitsuntide and Michaelmas. The Whitsuntide Chapter was the more important, when every brother was expected to be present.

In the early gatherings there was a fervour and spontaneity in their communion together. All things were freely discussed and decided upon. Here was a democracy of the spirit made possible through that secret of service and humility which Francis possessed in so rare a degree. He did not regard himself as leader or Master. One was their Master, Christ, and they all were brethren. The Master led the way, walked with them as of old with his disciples, all but visible.

The Rule itself was the chief subject of discussion, how it might best be applied to meet each situation and circumstance. It gave opportunity for the sharing of experiences. Then the prospective work was considered.

In the intervals from discussion they would separate into little groups, or in the quiet under the trees wander in solitary meditation.

Francis mingled with them all, and with one or with another

he would walk, best of companions, bracing each by his own rich faith. He won their love and full confidence through his personal concern and interest in each one. All felt the joy of his intimacy and trust. A word from Francis would suffice to restore confidence in a brother depressed after a season of apparent failure.

"A single sunbeam," he said, with a joyous thrill in his voice, "is sufficient to drive away many shadows."

Ofttimes the brothers plied him with questions, and in these ways he taught them. The conversation often turned upon the clergy, their covert opposition to the preaching of the brothers, the difficulties they actually set in their way. Instead of welcoming them as fellow servants, they very frequently regarded the brothers as intruders in their domain.

As they discoursed, each adding his testimony, their general grievance against the priesthood seemed to enlarge, and Francis could not fail to detect in it a measure of bitterness and the beginning of a possible growth of ill-will. He faced the subject with a rare wisdom, teaching them to render good for evil. And gently he suggested to them the power of courtesy in meeting difficulties, and the deference due to the priesthood by reason of their office, for do not their hands minister the sacred elements?

"Our life in the midst of the world," he taught, "should be such that everyone on hearing and seeing us shall feel constrained to praise our heavenly Father. If we would proclaim peace we must have it in our hearts. Let us avoid ill-will, lest we become an occasion of wrath or scandal to anyone, but rather by our gentleness persuade others to peace and good will in thought and deed."

"And," he said, "we must not make haste to judge our brothers, for after all we do not really know what they have to contend with. And spite of appearances to the contrary, there are those who appear to be children of the devil, who one day will be members of Christ."



Francis was ever on guard against the growth of spiritual pride. He felt the danger of its creeping in, as they compared the eager attention accorded to their teaching to the general listlessness attending the preaching of the clergy. Instead of winning their good will it would serve yet more to antagonise the priesthood.

With the rapid expansion of the Order the difficulties with the local clergy multiplied, and a complaint gathered, "Why does not Francis obtain a privilege from the Pope that we may preach without hindrance?" A deputation of friars waited on him.

"Brother, are you aware that the bishops often keep us many days before allowing us to preach, even if they give us permission at all? Would it not be well to obtain a privilege from the Lord Pope in this matter, as it would be for the benefit of souls?"

The reply of Francis was a rebuke.

"Apparently you do not yet understand God's purpose, that you would so prevent me from converting the whole world in the way that He wills. I wish by reverence and humility first to convert the prelates, who, when they observe our gentleness and humility, shall beseech us to preach, and even call the people to listen, which is far better than through privileges, which would lead you into pride. As for me, I desire this one privilege from the Lord, that never may I have any privilege from man, except to do reverence to all, and to convert the world by obedience to the Rule, and by example rather than by word."

In very contrast we see Francis himself facing this difficulty. During one of his preaching tours he passed through Imola. After his custom, in courtesy, on his arrival there he presented himself to the bishop,\* to ask of him authority to preach.

"I am not in need of anyone to aid me in my task," said the bishop.

\* Every little township had its bishop. It was a title of courtesy.

Francis withdrew gently and courteously, but in less than an hour he returned.

"What is it that you now want?" asked the bishop, a little testily. The answer of Francis was at once gentle and humorous.

"My lord," he said, "when a father drives his son out at the door he returns by the window."

Thus by his courteous persistence and humour he triumphed over the bishop's opposition and won his good will into the bargain.

At these early Chapters the most radiant of the brothers was Francis himself. They usually ended with the brothers gathering around him and he blessing them, when they would disperse in their several directions, buoyed with new enthusiasm.

One subject there was which could not fail to have been reflected in these meetings, a theme present in every mind, if not on every lip. It was momentous, such was the emphasis laid upon it, almost beyond any other.

The Holy Land had been overrun by the followers of Mahomet. News sped like wildfire through Europe that the Holy Sepulchre was being desecrated by the infidels, and that Christian pilgrims were being barbarously ill-treated. Fostered by the Church in season and out of season, the mental atmosphere became tense and electric with crusade enthusiasm. In this fact we find the reason for that extraordinary outbreak of child fanaticism which resulted about this time in the disastrous children's crusade, for the strange belief arose that it was ordained for the children to free the Holy Sepulchre.

Francis himself was not untouched by the crusade longing, but in him was it cleansed and purified. It was not to go sword in hand, but, instead, to carry his burning, eager message into the very camp of the enemy. He believed that its right presentation would convert the Saracens in multitudes.

In the autumn of 1212 he left Italy with this intent, but

his project was thwarted by a storm which drove the vessel which held the little group of brothers selected for this mission on the coast of Slavonia. They were obliged to return by the first vessel available, after suffering considerable hardships.

Francis took this as a divine indication not to proceed. Therefore the moment he landed, bending in obedience to that unspoken word of God, he plunged with the zeal of self-surrender in a new evangel in his own land.

He found an increasingly eager response to his preaching. This campaign probably lasted through the winter months 1212-1213. It is possible that he spent the Lent of 1213 in solitary vigil on the island in Lake Trasimeno in his desire to attune his life more closely to the will of God. The legend of his long fast there is familiar to all who have read the *Little Flowers of St. Francis*. His great work was not in the preaching to many, but in the touching of individuals. It took time, but it endured.

It was about this time, or even a little earlier, that Angelo Tancredi, one of the most devoted of the brothers, joined himself to Francis.

One day Francis, passing through the desert of Borgo San Sepolcro, came to a village called Monte Casale, and there a young man of gentle birth came eagerly to him.

"Father," he said, "I wish very greatly to become one of your brothers!"

"My son," answered Francis, "you are young, noble and refined, and it may well be that you could not endure our hardship and our poverty."

"But, my father," he said, "are not you men even as I, and even as you endure I will also be able to, with the grace of Jesus Christ."

Francis, greatly pleased with this answer, gave him his blessing, and at once received him into the Order, under the name of Brother Angelo. And so well did he conduct himself that he was at length made guardian of the

hermitage of Monte Casale, one of the little groupings of brothers that shortly came about.

The story as it continues shows the tender compassion Francis felt toward the unfortunate and the outcast.

At that time in this district were three notorious robbers, who one day came to the hermitage to ask for food, but the brothers answered them harshly with many reproofs.

"You who are thieves and cruel murderers, who without shame steal the fruits of others' labour, now with insolence would devour the alms bestowed on God's servants. Why, you are not worthy to live, having neither regard for God nor man. Begone, and see that you never come here again." And they departed full of rage.

When Francis returned, bearing with him a wallet of bread and a flask of wine which he had received as alms, the guardian recounted to him how they had sent away the robbers. But Francis was deeply pained. "Sinners," he said, "are brought back to God better by gentleness than by cruel reproofs. . . . I command you, therefore," he continued, "by holy obedience that you at once take this wallet of bread I have brought and this little flask of wine, and search diligently over mountain and valley until you find the robbers, and give them this bread and this wine as from me, and then kneel before them humbly, confessing your fault; and then on my behalf pray them to do no more ill, but to fear God, and that if they will do this I will provide for their needs and give them both food and drink. Then return in all humility."

When Angelo was gone Francis took himself to prayer, beseeching God to soften the hearts of the robbers unto penitence. . . . And Angelo did all that which was laid upon him, and the love of God wrought so wonderfully in the hearts of the robbers that they returned with him, and when Francis gently assured them of God's full pardon

if they repented they became converted, and in time entered the Order, continuing in great devotion until their death.

One day Francis and his companion, passing through Montefeltro, aware of something unusual taking place, learned that there was a gathering of the nobility at the castle. It was a gay pageant in honour of a young nobleman who was receiving the honour of knighthood. "Come, let us also enter," said Francis, "in courtesy and true chivalry doing honour to the occasion by speaking the Word as God may direct."

It is a testimony to the reverence in which he was held that at his entry there was at once a pause and a respectful silence until he might speak. Then taking for text some lines of a song that had caught his ear:

"So great the good I have in sight,  
In every hardship I delight,"

Francis preached so moving a sermon that many present stood spellbound, even forgetting the tourney.

After he had finished speaking, one of the nobles, Orlando of Chiusi, drew him aside, and said:

"Father, very greatly I desire to converse with you concerning salvation."

"Willingly," said Francis, "but first do honour to your friends; eat with them, and afterward we will converse as much as you please."

He did so, and then coming to Francis, said: "I have a mountain in Tuscany especially favourable to contemplation: it stands apart and solitary, and would well suit any who desired to do penance, far from the noises of the world. If acceptable to you, very gladly do I offer it unto you and your

\* There is another account of the coming of Angelo Tancredi, who was the first knight to enter the Order. Francis gazed lovingly at his beautiful manhood. "You have now carried the belt and sword and spurs of the world long enough. Kneel, and let me make you knight in the army of Christ."

brethren for the salvation of my soul." And very willingly and joyfully Francis accepted it. He could not, however, avail himself of the offer to see Mount Verna straightway, as the Whitsuntide (1214) Chapter was at hand, obliging his return to the Portiuncula.

During this Chapter a mission to Morocco was decided upon, under the leading of Francis himself.

In the year 1212 the Saracens in Spain had suffered a complete reverse, a defeat so great that it marked the beginning of the end of their western empire. It was felt that this victory was of little meaning in itself, if it were not made an opportunity to advance the Gospel in that alien land.

Immediately, the Chapter over, with a few chosen companions Francis set forth for Spain with the intention of crossing the straits from there to Morocco. So eager was he to fulfil this embassy of love that he sped before his fellows as he journeyed, that they could scarce keep up with him. In Spain they found so rich a field of labour, that they remained there for three months, with great and wonderful result, according to the Spanish tradition.

Yet now, once again his way was stayed, as if God said, "Not yet!" for almost on the eve of his setting out to fulfil the larger mission he was struck down by so severe an attack of fever that he could not proceed, and at length sorrowfully had to abandon it, to be present at the Whitsuntide (1215) Chapter.

It was essential, for he was not at ease concerning the Brotherhood, having become aware of an influence which was working contrary to the ideal that was his object and aim. His sensitive spirit was quickly alive to cross-currents of thought and feeling, even though hidden beneath the surface and unexpressed. He realised to his dismay that there were those among the brothers who did not see in the light in which he saw and had no understanding of his vision.

The months following this Chapter are among the most

obscure in the life of Francis. We may assume they were spent largely in retirement in one of the little hermitages of the Carceri.

When he attended the Chapter he was still physically very weak. Never robust, his spirit so surmounted his physical delicacy that the strenuousness of his labour far exceeded that of any of his followers.

His heart now was weighted as it had not been from the commencement of the Order. Twice had he sought to carry the evangel to the aliens, the mission of missions on which as knight-errant he had set his heart, eager to witness for Christ, if need be unto death. Twice had his effort been frustrated, as if God had answered "No!" A surge of feeling of a personal insufficiency and unworthiness swept over him. This feeling, added to the sense of a measure of defection in the Order from the one central ideal, made him wonder whether his strength was adequate for all now demanded of him in view of the rapid expansion of the Brotherhood.

A deep questioning assailed him, and for a moment he almost doubted his mission, wondering whether after all a contemplative life might not have been better and more fruitful. Might it in truth be other than he had imagined? His enthusiasm suddenly became weak, his spirit "dry," as the mystics would have termed it. His intuition failed him.

In his perplexity he sought the counsel of Clare, an incident signifying his belief in her judgment and right intuition, and of Silvester, the most quietly contemplative of the brothers.

Then a miracle happened. Their reply reassured and restored his spirit. He shook off his trouble and arose refreshed and healed. With fuller inspiration than he had ever known he went forward on the supreme mission of his life.

The story is beautifully told in the *Fioretti*.

Francis fell into great perplexity and doubt as to what behoved him to do; whether to be wholly intent on prayer or sometimes to preach. And greatly he desired to know

the will of God concerning these things. For since humility suffered him not to lean overmuch on his own judgment, he bethought him to seek the divine will through the prayers of others. Wherefore he called Brother Masseo and spoke to him thus: "Go to Sister Clare and bid her devoutly to seek God's will whether I should give myself to preaching or wholly to prayer. Then go to Brother Silvester and bid him to do the like." So Masseo departed and went first to Clare and then to Silvester.

Silvester straightway betook himself to prayer, and as he prayed received answer from God so clearly that he returned to Brother Masseo and said: "Go to Brother Francis and say to him that God hath not called him to this state for himself alone, but that he may bring forth fruit of souls and that many through him may be saved."

Masseo having received his answer, returned to Clare to learn what answer she had obtained of God, and she answered that she and her companion had received exactly the same word that had come to Brother Silvester.

And Brother Masseo returned to Francis, who greeted him as if he were God's messenger, washing his feet and setting meat before him. Then after Masseo had eaten, Francis called him into the wood and there knelt down, drew back his cowl, and making the sign of the cross, enquired: "What is the command of my Lord Jesus?" And Masseo answered: "Thus hath Christ answered the prayer both of Brother Silvester and of Sister Clare, revealing his will: that thou go forth to preach throughout the world, since he hath not chosen thee for thyself alone, but for the salvation of others."

Then Francis, when he heard this answer and learned thereby the will of Christ, rose up with fervour exceeding great and said: "Let us be going, in the name of God!"

Taking with him Brothers Masseo and Angelo, he set forth in great fervour of spirit, taking heed neither of road nor path.



## CHAPTER X

### THE GOSPEL TO EVERY CREATURE

THEY went in the direction of Bevagna, the spirit of Francis a pure flame of love and devotion. Those words of encouragement and direction had lifted him completely out of himself. The personality had become incandescent in that Love-light. To borrow a modern word, he passed into the state of cosmic-consciousness, or in the mystic phrase, of union with God.

The spirit of poetry has lingered over every footstep of this journey. It was an irradiation of wonder and joy and love. Through deep stress of emotion, lost to the self thought, his being was transfigured, becoming for the moment a pure vehicle of the Divine Spirit.

The end of the mystic quest has been defined as that condition in which the human soul becomes to the Infinite Goodness as his hand is to a man. Francis had reached that point through an absolute self-abandon.

It is little wonder that this mission assumes so important a place in the Franciscan legend. If in the detail uncertain, in that the narratives must have passed through the lips of many ere being set to writing, without doubt there is reflected a spirit all on fire with the Love of God.

As in that fervour of spirit he went on his way, he happened to raise his eyes and notice some trees on the wayside on which were a multitude of birds, so that he wondered, and said to his companions: "Wait here a little, while I go and speak to my little sisters the birds." And endearingly he spoke to them, exhorting them lovingly to praise God in all their ways. Then he drew near to them, and instead of being scared they flocked about him eagerly with little love-cries.

He then made the sign of the cross over them and walked among them, blessing them, lifting some in his hands and others gently stroking. As he did thus they all sought to come close to be fondled. At length he dismissed them and with one accord they soared aloft with songs of praise.

They thus came to the little city of Alviano, and when they arrived the people all came thronging into the market-place to hear him. He had but commenced to speak when his voice was drowned by the twittering of many swallows.

After pausing a little while he said: "Little sister swallows, now that you have had your turn, be silent while I speak and until my sermon is ended." And the swallows were obedient to his word. And we read that he preached with such fervour that all the men and women listening to him, with one accord sought to follow him. But Francis turned to them and said: "Do not be hasty to leave your homes, and I will arrange for you what to do and how you shall live, for the salvation and blessing of your souls."

Then the legend tells how he had the first clear thought and determination to found the Third Order, "for the salvation of all the world," so that none howsoever they were situated might be excluded from the Brotherhood.

His love flowed out to every living thing, praising God for all the life around, from the sun radiant overhead to the soft earth we tread under foot.

It was surely this divinely selfless love, this simplicity of thought and feeling, this throbbing sympathy with all that lives which drew forth peace and concord where had been wrath and hatred, strife and fear. If Love triumphs and is enthroned in one single life, and has "taken captivity captive," is not such personal experience prophetic of the inspired Hebrew vision of that time when "the wolf shall dwell with the lamb and the leopard shall lie down with the kid, and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them"?

The extraordinary story of the taming of the fierce wolf of Gubbio is appropriate to this period. Francis arriving, found the people in a state of panic because of the depredations of wolves, and in particular of one enormous wolf so ferocious that it attacked not merely animals, but human beings. No one dared leave the city gates without a weapon in his hand. And for the most part people kept well within the walls.

When he realised the cause of their agitation, Francis, with great compassion, said :

“I will go forth to meet brother wolf.”

And in spite of urgent entreaty to the contrary, he and his companion, with this intent, set out unarmed, their faith resting in God.

When the wolf saw Francis it made as if to attack him, but he, making the sign of the cross, said in a tone of command :

“Follow me, brother wolf, and in Christ’s name do thou no more harm, either to me or anyone else.”

And oh wonder ! immediately he made that sign the wolf suddenly stayed and ceased raging, then came gently as a lamb and lay down to rest at his feet. Then it followed him into the city in such wise that none were afraid.

And Francis spoke into the soul of the wolf; and made a pact with the people that they should provide it with food. Then he said : “Brother wolf, do you promise to fulfil your part to offend neither man nor beast?”

And the wolf by gentle movements of its head and body, its ears and tail, indicated that it would obey his behest. Then lifting up its right paw, it placed it in the hand of Francis, thus pledging itself before the people.

From this time, so runs the story, the wolf moved in and out among the people very sociably, becoming endeared to

all and doing harm to none. After two years, to everybody's grief, it died of old age.

It is a story that one would at first be inclined to dismiss as highly improbable, were it not curiously corroborated by the discovery of the skeleton of an enormous wolf in the crypt of the church in this very place.

A vein of rich humour often breaks through the narrative, a humour that at once combines kindness and understanding. Masseo, the companion of Francis, appears very frequently in the legend. He was by nature richly endowed, tall, handsome, eloquent, and he was not wholly unconscious of his gifts. At the same time he possessed abounding good will, and was a favourite among the brothers. His great desire was to attain the gift of humility.

One day, as they took their way single file in meditation, Masseo a little ahead, they came to a crossing where three roads met. Here Masseo paused to enquire by which of these they should journey.

"Why, the way that God wills!" answered Francis. For he knew that in the Spirit the right way is just that which we take in simple trust.

"But how are we to know?" enquired Masseo.

"By this sign, then," said Francis, "which I will show you. Stand now just where these three roads meet, and turn round like the children do, until I tell you to stop."

Then Masseo, as he afterwards recounted, obediently did as desired, turning round and round until he nearly fell through giddiness, until Francis at length said: "Stand still and do not move."

And he said: "In which direction is your face turned?" And Masseo answered: "Towards Siena."

"Then," said Francis, "this is the direction God would have us go!"

Arriving at Siena, they found the city raging with civil strife. but as they entered the people gathered about Francis

and he preached to them so earnestly that he brought them all to peace and to great unity and concord with one another.

They were housed by the bishop of the city, who came to do them honour, but early on the following morning they rose up and quietly departed.

There was in Francis' time a movement toward freedom taking place throughout all Italy, each city and township seeking autonomy and self-government, on the one hand freedom from over-lordship of Pope or Emperor, and on the other, freedom of citizenship from the exactions of the local nobility.

At Siena Francis noticed some little turtle-doves held captive and for sale, and at request obtained them. Holding them in the skirt of his mantle, he said: "Little sister turtle-doves, you are very simple and innocent, but why do you let yourselves be caught? I shall save you from death and have nests made for you, so that you may bring forth young and freely multiply according to God's will."

And indeed he had nests made for them all, and they began to lay their eggs and bring up their young under the very eyes of the brothers.

Crossing the lake at Rieti, Francis was presented by the boatman with a large tench which he had just caught. He accepted it gladly, but to the amazement of the boatman he put it back into the water, bidding it give praise to God.

Once his heart was stirred to rapture by the joy-song of the little cicada from its perch on the branch of a fig-tree near by. Gently he called it and it came and lighted on his hand, and he said: "Sing, little brother, and praise your Creator with your gladsome song," and the little insect then chirruped its sweetest, not fearing till he gave it his blessing and bade it go.

On this missionary journey, as traced by Sabatier, Francis passing from Alviano went to Narni, "one of the most fas-

inating cities of Umbria, where the people were busy in building a cathedral, in this way celebrating the conquest of their communal liberties." There he was welcomed with eager joy. From thence he took his way down the valley of Rieti, which with the towns Greccio, Fonte-Colombo, San Fabiano, Sant-Eleuthero, Poggio-Buscone, still retain the most fragrant memories of his presence. It was indeed in this province that his message bore its richest fruit.

When the news of his coming reached the villages the bells rang out with joyous peals, and the people flocked to meet him: a splendid tribute to the love and sunshine that his presence brought.

The following touching legend concerning the city of Todi may perhaps be traced to this journey :

One day, when climbing the hill on which stands the western gate of Todi, Francis met a woman descending towards the Tiber with a covered basket on her head.

"What is this that you carry?" he enquired.

The woman, much embarrassed, answered: "Only a few poor garments which I would wash in the river."

"No, that is not so!" exclaimed Francis, "for what you carry belongs to me and belongs to God. Put down your basket on the ground that I may claim my own."

The woman tremblingly obeyed, and Francis, uncovering the basket, lifted from it a new-born babe, thus saved by his prevention from the waters of the Tiber.

Taking the infant in his arms, he gave it in charge to a good woman of the city, and later, according to the tradition, he built with his own hands a cottage outside the walls to shelter the little child and its foster-mother. Thus was founded the Hospital for Foundlings of the city of Todi.

It was through prayer and contemplation that Francis found strength sufficient for his labours. Out of that pure

communion there sprang a stream of blessing and praise and love for every living thing.

Prayer works with love. "It is the effort of all that is most personal in us." It is the greatest moral act, encompassing in little the self-surrender of a whole life. With Francis as with Jesus it was not merely a strife; it was a communion deep and pure, a *rapport* of the human soul with the divine most sweet and ineffable. It is at its best no merely passive condition of "waiting on the Lord," but the fixing or knitting of the will with all its power in the will of God.

Then only may the full blessedness of communion be realised. It is not broken when the soul steps without the door of quiet contemplation, but continues in that "peace that passeth understanding" amid the daily activity and fellowship.

Francis deprecated the too much reading of books. He affirmed the necessity of prayer. It is said of Francis that his attention in prayer opened the door to his super-normal experience. He was caught and lifted quite out of himself, and it was as if some beneficent energy was released, with great and wonderful result.

"There was in his whole person," writes Celano of Francis at this period, the time when he himself was drawn to become his disciple, "a delicacy and a grace which made him infinitely lovely." But Francis' own description of himself is "one of mean appearance." Yet when he spoke, so absorbed was he in the message he had to give that his face and form were transfigured, a glow suffused his features, a radiance shone from him, his very physical being seemed enlarged.

His gentle presence, so kind and so compassionate, was a very source of new strength and courage to all who turned to him.

Masseo, noting all these things, marvelled exceedingly. Wondering if Francis really had that rich humility which seemed apparent, he sought one day to prove it.

"Why after you, why after you, why after you?" he said in Francis' hearing, though as if to himself.

"What is this that you say?" said Francis.

Quoth Masseo: "I say, Why does all the world turn toward you? and why do all men long to see you, hear you, and even obey you? For you are not a man comely in form; you are of no great talent; you are not noble of birth! How comes it, then, that it is after you that the whole world is running?"

Hearing this, Francis, all overjoyed in spirit, lifting his face unto heaven, stood for a great while with his mind uplifted in God. Then returning to himself, he knelt down and gave praise and thanks to God.

"And then with great fervour of spirit he turned to Masseo and said: "Would you indeed know why after me, would you know why after me, would you know why after me it is that the whole world is running? This comes to me from the eyes of the most high God, which behold at all times the evil and the good; for those most holy eyes have seen among men not one more worthless, not one more lacking, no greater sinner than am I. Wherefore to do this marvellous work that he purposes He has not found upon the earth a creature less worthy, and therefore has He chosen me to confound the nobleness and the greatness and the strength and the beauty and the wisdom of the world, to the intent that men may know that all virtue and all goodness come from Him, and not from the creature, and that no man may glory in himself, but that he that glories shall glory in the Lord, unto whom is honour and glory for ever and ever."

Then Brother Masseo, at so humble a reply uttered with so great fervour, was afraid, and knew of a surety that Francis was rooted and grounded in humility.



## CHAPTER XI

### THE CHAPTER OF THE RUSH-MATS

THE Order during its early years had been looked upon indulgently by the Church authorities or dismissed with a shrug of the shoulders as inconsequent, much as the Salvation Army in our own time. But in 1217 it had taken on historic importance. It was, in fact, becoming influential in a way that could not be ignored by reason of its immense popularity. The message of Francis was alive with conviction which, by its very contrast to the deadness of ecclesiastical religion, could not fail to awaken an answering response.

It echoed through the heart of Italy. The countryside thrilled to his message. All hearts were agog to hear him. Up and down Italy Francis went in the strength of Christ's mandate. The Gospel fell from his lips as if it were newly uttered, for it was original in his experience. It held the ear, it arrested the heart, simple though his words were.

So great devotion attended his steps that when news of his coming reached a village all work would cease; craftsmen and farm-workers would drop their tools, merchants and clerks would leave their counting-houses, women would stay their labour, and all would throng to the market-place to hear "the Saint," a word that was whispered from lip to lip.

In July, 1216, Pope Innocent III died, and was succeeded by Honorious III. Giovanni di San Paolo, Bishop of the Sabine, who, as "Protector of the Order," had exercised a kindly overruling, also died in that same year.

It was at this time that the most influential of all the Cardinals stepped forward as successor to Giovanni. This was Ugolini, Bishop of Ostia, whose name has already been

mentioned. He had watched the growth of the Order with a very eager and friendly interest. He was, therefore, very joyously received and welcomed.

"How glad I am to offer you my service," he said. "You will find me at all times ready and eager to give you whatever help I can, and the counsel and protection that you may desire. . . . And I would be especially grateful to be remembered in your prayers."

The Chapter of 1217 is known in legend as the Chapter of the Rush-mats, although the important Chapters of the two following years might almost equally have been so called.

It was by far the largest gathering up to that time. Being a late Whitsuntide, it fell at the beginning of the Italian summer. The few booths rapidly constructed were quite inadequate to house the brethren, who came streaming in from every part. But well content were they to sleep under the canopy of the trees on mattresses made of rushes cut near by.

In accordance with their custom, the brothers carried provisions sufficient for only one day. The people of the district around, however, flocking to these meetings, brought glad offerings of provisions to meet their every necessity, and all which kindly thought could conjure of what might prove acceptable or needful.

After his death the Chapters became merely assemblies of delegates to discuss matters of moment concerning the Order. But during the lifetime of Francis their purpose was essentially religious, and, as we have seen in the earlier gatherings, were primarily for fellowship and communion, and were seasons of encouragement, of joy and praise.

The Chapter opened with a fervent sermon by Francis himself, in which, after a warm welcome to all the brothers, he affirmed and expounded the Rule, applying it in various ways.

"Have faith in God," he said, "and do not take thought upon what you should eat or what you should drink, and

cease from all anxiety concerning your body, but give Him praise with glad hearts, for He has special care for you, for all your labour is a sacrament and all your work is prayer.”

It came to his notice that many brothers were inflicting torture upon themselves for the sake of discipline, by practices not at all uncommon in those days among religious devotees. Some were wearing hair shirts under their tunics, others leather belts or chain armour with sharp points that pierced into the flesh.

Francis said: “No, that is not the way in which a *minore* should do penance”; and he commanded by holy obedience that every brother who had a hair shirt or a mail or band of iron or the like should take it off and lay it down before him. This was done, and altogether there was a very great heap. Francis thereupon forbade these practices, urgently impressing on the brothers that gospel-perfection is best realised in the service of love, in self-forgetfulness and praise.

Though the assembly was very great, the orderly, modest behaviour of the brothers seems especially to have been noted, so well did they respond to the teaching of humility or selflessness, conveyed not merely by precept, but in the very person of their beloved leader. And Francis moved among them with that magic of love that made each feel that he was specially beloved.

Dominic\* the following year witnessing these things, and noticing the absence of what seemed to him but common prudence, marvelled exceedingly. His first feeling was critical, for he thought that Francis was indiscreet in not anticipating the needs of the brethren and in making provision accordingly. But, as the legend runs:

The chief Shepherd, Christ, willing to show his care for his sheep and his tender love for his little ones, straightway

\* Dominic, head and founder of the Dominicans, known as “the preaching friars.”

put it into the hearts of the people of Perugia, of Spoleto, of Foligno, of Spello and of Assisi and of the country round about to bring food and drink to the brothers assembled. And he beheld how from all these parts came men with sumpter beasts, horses and carts with loads of bread, of wine, of honeycombs, and cheese, and other good things to eat, according as the poor of Christ had need. Besides this they brought napkins, earthen pots, bowls, drink-cups and other vessels necessary for so great a multitude, and he considered himself the most blessed who could bring the most or serve most diligently; in such sort that even the knights and barons and other gentlefolk that came to see did service unto them with great devotion and humility. And Dominic said: "Truly these *minores* are in God's special care." And so uplifted was his spirit at sight of it that he determined then and there to do likewise in his own Order. "From henceforth," he said, "I will observe holy poverty." And so it was that it became established in his own Rule.

The Chapter of 1217 was noted for two new ordinances. By the first it was decided definitely to organise the foreign missions. By the second Italy was divided, for evangelical purposes, into districts or mission dioceses. In the most favourable position in each district there would be a tiny Franciscan settlement. The brothers placed at the head of these local missions were to be known as provincial ministers, and for their use and service a rough and temporary hermitage would be constructed.

It was an endeavour to follow up and, in a degree, to consolidate their work. For this purpose a certain organisation was necessary which, in however simple a way, was in its own measure a departure from the spontaneity that had hitherto characterised the Movement. But the Brotherhood had now increased out of all bounds, rendering method necessary to order.

Nevertheless, it was with some reluctance and foreboding that Francis agreed to the creation of provincial ministers; nor was he ever reconciled to it, as certain of the writings testify. "The brothers have come to the assistance of the clergy," he had said. It was not his will that they should become a separate organisation.

"How, then, did he permit this new departure?" The plain answer is that it marks the beginning of Ugolini's active intervention in the Order. And he represented the Church at the fountain-head. It was evident that the Order had come to stay, and he wished to see it as an institution in the Church at the service of the Church.

. . . . .

From the commencement of his pontificate Honorius ardently preached a new crusade. It had been prophesied that under his rule the Holy Land would be reconquered. The brothers were caught up in a wave of enthusiasm, and the first eager decision of the Chapter of 1217 was to despatch a mission to Syria. It was desired that Francis would assume the leadership, but he humbly withdrew himself, and appointed Brother Elias of Cortona in his stead. Elias for the first time steps forward and becomes prominent in the Movement. Francis held him in high esteem for his practical wisdom. In all that he had undertaken he had shown his executive ability. For he had great administrative gifts. Yet in many ways he was the very antithesis to Francis. Ardent and earnest to behold a religious reformation, he joined the Movement in the early days, and flung himself into it. But his light was intellectual rather than spiritual. He loved Francis—there is no doubt of it—but he never truly understood the depth of his message. And, alas, he was ambitious!

With the support of Ugolini, Elias was yet to rise to the premier position in the Order, alas! later to become the arm of ill that was to divert the Movement right out of its original channel. His name later became a byword of all that should

not be, but as we read the narrative we are wise if we make allowance for the animus reflected throughout, and find at the beginning at least an honest intention, even if later it was tainted through the exercise of power.

The mission to Syria proved a great success, and many new brothers were received into the Order who, on their return from the crusade would, with high enthusiasm, carry the message to their own countries. Notable among them was Cæsar of Speyer, destined to evangelise southern Germany with wonderful result.

Simultaneously with the mission to Syria groups of friars were now sent into Germany, Hungary and Spain, while Francis himself prepared to lead a mission into France. He was enthusiastic, for he always had a great love for France. Masseo was his immediate companion.

As he passed through Florence he met Ugolini, who was there preaching the crusade. Then to his great surprise the cardinal, instead of encouraging Francis in his mission, very earnestly sought to dissuade him from it.

"My brother," he said, "I would rather that you do not cross the mountains, for there are many prelates who desire nothing better than to stir up difficulties for you at the court of Rome. I and others loving the order wish to protect and help you, but it is desirable at present that you should not leave Italy."

"But, my lord," said Francis, "it would be a great disgrace for me to send my brethren far away and for me to remain idly here, sharing none of the hardships they must undergo."

"Why have you, then," said the cardinal, "sent your brothers so far afield, exposing them to starvation and peril of every kind?"

"Do you think," replied Francis, warmly, "that God raised up the brothers for this country alone? No, it is not so. God has raised them up for the awakening and salvation

of all men, that they may win souls not only in the countries of those who believe, but also in the very midst of the infidels."

At these fervent words Ugolini marvelled, and affirmed his belief in the good work that was to be accomplished. But he still pressed so strongly that Francis should not proceed that the latter returned to Portiuncula.

Francis therefore appointed Brother Pacifico to lead the mission into France. This brother, before his conversion, had achieved great renown as a poet, having been crowned by the Emperor himself as Prince of Poesy. Francis had once preached in his hearing so compellingly that the poet felt himself "pierced through and through with the sword that penetrates between the joints and the marrow, yea, unto the very thoughts and intents of the heart." On the morrow he had joined the Order and received from Francis the symbolic surname of Brother Pacifico.

It became the custom for the friars to make their headquarters near to the great cities. Pacifico and his fellow companions established themselves near to Paris, at St. Denis. Their mission proved very fruitful, so that it was possible to follow it up by an evangel to England, with even richer result.

Francis had no sooner returned to St. Mary of the Angels than he again set out, at Ugolini's urgent wish, toward Rome. He was, as before, accompanied by Masseo. The cardinal's warning to Francis had doubtless been based on actual knowledge, for evidently a suggestion of heresy had been spread, and had gained credence by reason of the independence of Francis, who, in marked contrast to Dominic, never consulted the papal authorities concerning the work and activities of the Order. He sent his friars abroad, content with the purely verbal authorisation of Innocent III.

Ugolini felt that the wisest course would be to present Francis himself before the Curia.

Of Francis' journey to Rome, and the return, there are few

remembered details. But there is one delightful Franciscan picture.\*

Coming with Masseo one day to a town, sore hungered, they went according to the Rule, begging their bread for the love of God, and Francis went by one street and Masseo by another.

But because Francis was mean to look upon and small of stature, he was not distinguished from an ordinary beggar by those who knew him not, and all he received was a few scraps of dry bread. Masseo, on the other hand, because he was tall and fair of form, came laden with good pieces, large and in plenty, and of fresh bread.

They met together in a place outside the town where was a beautiful spring and a fine broad stone close by, on which each set the alms he had obtained.

Francis, seeing that Brother Masseo's pieces of bread were more and finer and larger than his own, laughingly said: "Brother Masseo, we are not worthy of such vast treasure!"

"Vast treasure?" responded Masseo, puzzled. "Why, what do you mean? For see," he said, "we have not any of those things which people consider to be so needful. We have neither cloth nor knife nor plate nor porringer; we have no table, neither have we either manservant or maid-servant."

But how good to be free from those things that most people strive after.

"Look!" said Francis; and with one of those swift flights of vision which showed him to be poet as well as saint and mystic, he said: "Do you not see how Nature herself comes to serve at our table spread by Lady Poverty? Is it not the Table of the Lord, to which all living things are invited—the little birds, the animals, and we also?"

\* *Fioretti*.



And then he added: "This is what I account vast treasure"; and he drew his companion's attention to the beauty and wonder around. "See! nothing is prepared by human hands. All is given out of God's providence, manifest in this almsbread, in this table of stone so excellent, in this fountain so clear. Oh, I would that God might draw our hearts to love the treasure of holy poverty, our holding nothing as one's own, a treasure so high and noble that unto it God made Himself as a servant."

When they had refreshed themselves they resumed their journey, communing together on the meaning and wonder of poverty. And as Francis pondered on it his fervour, we read, became exceeding great. Coming to a little church on the roadside, they entered, and kneeling before the altar, their minds uplifted in prayer, the soul of Francis became enkindled into an ecstasy of contemplation in his love of holy poverty. The colour of his face heightened, and he seemed to breathe in an unwonted way. And Masseo felt an upliftment the like of which he had never known. It was as an influence coming from Francis, and touching him inwardly. And, as he afterwards related, he tasted a sweetness in his soul and spiritual consolation such as he had never experienced.

And it was in this manner that they came to Rome, conversing together upon the inestimable treasure of holy poverty.

"It is a treasure," said Francis, "excelling all others; so divine that we are unworthy of it. It is that divine virtue whereby we achieve mastery over every fleeting earthly thing, and by the power of which all hindrances are lifted from the soul, so that she may freely link herself to God. Oh, this is the virtue that enables the soul, still tied to earth, to hold converse with the angels in heaven, and this it is that hung with Christ upon the Cross, with Christ was buried, with Him rose again and ascended into heaven, the which also in this life gives our souls an easier flight, in

that it maintains our true humility and love. So let us pray that we may become true lovers, followers and humble disciples, of the most precious, most lovable and priceless pearl of Gospel poverty.”

These stories indicate the earnest spiritual concentration of Francis on this occasion, when his face was set towards Rome. For is not his challenge to the Church on this very point of poverty, which he sees as an ideal ever going before, and he ever reaching towards it? “My God and my all,” the prayer of his first awakening, still shone as a star before him.

## CHAPTER XII

### THE CRUSADE—1219

**A**RRIVING at Rome, Francis found Ugolini awaiting him. At the Cardinal's pressing desire, he consented to appear before the Pope and convey his own message in person. The thought of preaching before the Vicar of Christ made him hesitant and nervous, and he took the precaution of learning by heart what he wished to say. Ugolini himself was not wholly at ease in the matter, especially when Francis, in the presence of Honorius and the cardinals, confessed that he had quite forgotten all that he had prepared himself to say. And then he spoke directly from his heart with such earnest conviction that the meeting was won. His faith, sincerity, humility, were clearly evident. But it was equally clear that this man, obedient at all times to the inner prompting, could never be bound by rules.

Ugolini had arranged the visit of Francis to coincide with Dominic's presence in Rome. The leader of the "preaching friars" met with great favour and patronage. Equal favours were pressed upon Francis, but he wisely declined them, pointing to the central privilege already obtained to the effect that *the Order might remain without privileges*. He knew that every gift of this nature carried with it a binding influence, and that privilege would ultimately spell control, which later actually proved the case.

One of the objects in drawing the two men together was that if possible the two Orders might be united. Dominic, who was first approached, gladly favoured the suggestion; not so Francis.

One day Dominic asked of Francis the cord with which

he was girded, and with some persistency having obtained it, girded himself with it, and said: "Brother, I long very earnestly that your Order and mine should become one single organisation within the Church."

Francis, however, declined. The two Orders, in fact, never coalesced, but from that time to this their labours have very largely coincided.

Ugolini on one occasion\* drew the two together in private council, saying: "In the early Church the pastors and prelates were poor, and men fervent in charity, not greed. Why, therefore, should we not make bishops and prelates of your friars, who would afford to all others a right example?"

There was then a contention of humility between the two men, each turning to the other that he might answer first. But at last the humility of Francis conquered, so that he did not answer first; and Dominic conquered, who, by answering first, did humbly obey. Dominic therefore answering, said: "My lord, my brethren have been exalted to a good position if they will but know it, and, as far as lies in my power, I shall never permit them to attain any form of dignity."

Then Francis said: "My Lord, my brethren are called *minores* for this reason, that they should not presume to become greater. For their vocation teaches them to remain lowly and to imitate the footsteps of the humility of Christ."

"Art and poetry," writes Sabatier, "have done well in inseparably associating St. Francis and St. Dominic. If Francis is the man of inspiration, Dominic is the man of obedience to orders: one might almost say that his life was passed on the road to Rome, whither he continually went to ask for instructions."

Francis was sure of the rightness of his action in the refusal

\* *Speculum*.

of privileges. He instinctively knew that were he to allow the door once to open, it would never be closed. True poverty would be lost. The freedom of the Order would be imperilled; the ideal it embosomed, the new society, lending meaning to it all, "Christ's own charge," be endangered. Spite of his humility and reverence toward the Church and all that it represented, he was completely independent in his action. He stood firm for his principle, despite a growing pressure within and without. Alas! the door to intervention was forced ajar when, in the Michaelmas of 1218 Chapter, the little mission groups returning from Germany, Hungary and Spain narrated their difficult experiences. In the two former countries they had met with sad ill-treatment, owing to their ignorance of the language of the people. The ridicule and contumely to which they were subjected was not infrequently at the instigation of the local clergy.

The brothers were profoundly moved. At once there was a demand for a privilege from the Pope which would ensure future protection in like circumstances. It was readily given. A special brief was issued that would cover each mission, ensuring a full protection. It runs as follows :

"Honorius, bishop, servant of the servants of God, to the archbishops, bishops, abbots, deacons, archdeacons, and other ecclesiastical superiors, salutations and the apostolic blessing.

"Our dear son, Brother Francis, and his companions of the Order of the Brothers Minor, have chosen a way of life which has the approval of the Roman Church. It is that they may go forth in the manner of the Apostles, and sow the seed of the Word of God in different lands. We therefore pray and exhort you by these apostolic letters to receive as good Catholics the brothers of this society, bearers of these presents, expecting you to receive them graciously and to treat them kindly, for the glory of God and out of consideration for us.

"Given (at Rieti) this third day of the ides of June (June 11th, 1219), in the third year of our pontificate."

Ugolini's position was now established.

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Ugolini was to be the guest of the brothers at the Whitsuntide Chapter of 1218. When tidings came of his arrival, the brothers, led by Francis, went forth to meet him. The Cardinal, gladdened and surprised at so rich and courteous a welcome, at once dismounted and walked with them as a brother, expressing his love and joy at being among them.

An altar was erected in the woodland cloisters and a service of devotion held in the open, Francis officiating as deacon while the Cardinal performed the Mass.

His being present at the Chapter gave Ugolini opportunity to sound the brothers themselves concerning the future of the Order. And he found a body of opinion that would view with approval and favour the purpose that prompted his interview with Francis and with Dominic in Rome. The difficulty lay in the attitude of Francis himself.

Many of the new brothers had come from the ranks of the students who, filled with the desire for knowledge, had been flocking to the newly-established universities. One of the most renowned of these seats of learning was that of Bologna, also a Franciscan centre.

The first enthusiasm passing, there arose among many of these student-brothers a tendency to criticise the extreme simplicity of their life. They did not see why they should not enjoy some of the privileges attaching to the older monastic orders. From this grievance came the demand, that, considering the rapid increase and wider activities of the Order, it would be for the general good were they and others to share in the responsibility. "This was the general method," they said, "in other Orders, as we see from the Rule of St. Benedict, for instance, or of St. Augustine, or St. Bernard."

These dissenting brothers found a sympathetic listener in Ugolini, who discreetly put to Francis their suggestions.

Francis did not answer, but taking the hand of Ugolini, he led him to where these friars were assembled, and spoke thus to them in the fervour of his spirit.

“My brothers,” he said, “the Lord has called me by the way of simplicity and humility, and in this way has shown the Truth for me, and for those who follow me. Do not therefore say that we should do this, or that, or the other because it is in the rule of St. Benedict, St. Augustine, or St. Bernard, or any other Order. The important thing for us is what God in His mercy has seen fit to reveal to me, and has shown how by its means He would make a new covenant with the world, and it is not His will that we should have any other. Beware then lest God, through your imagined wisdom and knowledge, bring you to confusion, till at length you return with reproach to your present state of humility willye, nillye.”

At these words, spoken with such warmth, Ugolini was silent. He had no answer to make. Thus Francis based his authority upon his spiritual experience, Christ's own word in him: it was a sacred charge.

Having expressed himself so earnestly and vehemently, Francis at once became all love again, giving of himself in the radiance of his fellowship.

The Chapter proved a continual revelation to Dominic, who, as we have seen, was also present. When it ended he returned to Spain with the expressed intention of modifying his own Order after the Franciscan pattern.

The new Crusade was fixed by the Pope for 1219, and expectancy excited by prophecy reached a high pitch. Enthusiasm was fanned into a flame by organised bodies of preachers in every Christian land. Francis, evangelising among the people, took up the popular theme, but gave it new and personal application to the hearer. His prime concern was the conversion of souls unto the new and better life.

He was child of his age sufficiently to desire that the Holy Land should be made free for Christian pilgrimage. And it seemed almost like desecration that the Holy Sepulchre should be held by the enemies of the faith. But his greatest desire was to see the Saracens brought to Christ.

The Whitsuntide Chapter of 1219 is important, for the reason that it was the last of the Chapters freely presided over by Francis. By invitation the Order was to be represented in the crusading army and, by general desire of the brothers, supported by Ugolini, Francis himself was to lead the mission. That his wish was to be at last fulfilled was like wine to his heart, and his eagerness of spirit was reflected in the assembly. His hopes of what it might lead to were eagerly expressed, and so drew the enthusiasm of his fellows that many were ardent to join him.

Missionary fervour glowed at white heat. When we consider the religious psychology of the time, we can realise how frequently conversation and meditation must have dwelt upon the sacred death of martyrdom, deemed so high a privilege that many would deliberately court it. But to the luminous soul of Francis a holier martyrdom was found in that daily dying to the selfhood, essential to the pure Christian life.

Two other missions were determined in this Chapter, one to Tunis under the leadership of Brother Giles, and one to Spain and Morocco. The former failed lamentably, for arriving at Tunis, they were compelled by the Christians of that port to return straightway, fearing lest their own position might be imperilled. That to Morocco was notable, in that five of the brethren suffered the death of martyrdom. The news, when it came, fell with profound and moving effect. The Order was stirred to its depths. Francis exclaimed, his eyes filled with tears: "Behold our first-born! Behold those whom above all others we may claim as our true brethren!"

It was not in search of martyrdom, however, that Francis undertook his mission. Wholly forgetful of self, his spirit



burned with the desire to serve his fellows and win the hearts of those to whom he ministered.

He was accompanied by many brothers to Ancona, the port from which the Crusaders were to sail. But arriving there, they found that owing to the inconvenience of travelling by sea and the dependence of the brothers on the charity of their fellow voyagers for their food, the majority of the brothers would have to be left behind.

Francis led them all to the quay, and there explained how the matter stood. "The people of the boat refuse to take us all," he said, "and I have not the courage to make choice among you, for you might think that I did not love you all alike. Let us then seek God's will." And he called a little child who was playing near by, and by the choice of the little one picked out eleven of the brethren to accompany him.

They arrived at Acre about the middle of July, and there linked up with the mission of Elias, established now for two years. Francis divided the brothers into little groups, and sent them in various directions, he himself with two or three companions taking the route to Egypt, where, at Damietta, the camp of the Crusaders lay.

He was greatly distressed at sight of the conditions prevailing. The army was quite undisciplined and disorganised, its moral state unspeakable. So moved was he, that when there was talk of battle, he advised strongly against it, predicting that the Christian army would be defeated. His word, however, was disregarded, and on August 29th the Crusaders attacked the Saracens, and even as he had foretold, were disastrously routed. From this time his influence rapidly increased, and his presence made itself so felt that many were drawn to join the Brotherhood.

Jacques de Vitry, in a letter written a few days after the battle, gives his impression of Francis.

"I must now inform you that Master Reynier, Prior of St. Michael, has entered the Order of the Brothers Minor,

an order which is rapidly multiplying on all sides, because it imitates the primitive Church and follows the life of the Apostles in everything.

"The master of these brothers is named Brother Francis. He is so lovable that he is venerated by everyone. Having come into our army, he has not been afraid, in his zeal for the faith, to go to that of our enemies. For days together he proclaimed the word of God to the Saracens, but with little success. Then the Sultan, King of Egypt, asked him in secret to entreat God to reveal to him by some miracle which is the best religion."

These interviews with the Sultan are established by other writings, and it is evident that Francis and his companions were treated with great consideration, even while the hostilities were at their height.

Returning to the Christian camp, they were there when Damietta was taken, November 5th, 1219, by the Crusaders. Francis was horrified by what took place. The city was ruthlessly sacked, and then pestilence, rife in the city, broke out in the camp of the victors.

Francis by this time had left for Syria, having been granted free access to the holy places. There is some reason to think that he spent his Christmas at Bethlehem.

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When the Whitsuntide Chapter 1220 convened, Francis was still in Syria.

During his absence the governance of the Order was vested indirectly in Ugolini, through two of his nominees, Matteo of Narni and Gregory of Naples, his nephew.

Francis had gladly given to Ugolini that same freedom of action which he himself exercised. Unfortunately the Cardinal used his power in a way that appears not wholly creditable to himself, for he took the opportunity to contravene some of the basic rules of the Order, so essential, in Francis' mind,

for the maintenance of poverty and humility and of spiritual freedom. At the same time he doubtless satisfied himself that he was acting entirely for the best interests of the Order, as well as for the Church, and that he had behind him the support of a strong feeling within the Order itself.

It is evident that the brothers placed in authority started blindly and without understanding to subvert the very foundation principles of the Order, lessening the vow of poverty while multiplying observances; so great a contrast to Francis' method of adhering to poverty in its full meaning as the central principle while simplifying disciplinary observances.

That, spite of protest, these changes were established at the Whitsuntide 1220 Chapter, indicated a strong body of opinion favourable to such alteration, and this was the argument with which Ugolini met Francis on his return. Persecution actually broke out against those who held to the stricter Rule, and therefore opposed this procedure.

But there were those who, recognising the real meaning of what was taking place, were thoroughly alarmed. When the Chapter ended a brother set out to the east to entreat Francis to return. A report of his death had been spread abroad, and the Order was in danger of a serious cleavage. Francis, in fact, had been seriously laid up with fever contracted in the low marshy districts, following upon his unceasing labour.

His mind had been strangely troubled with presentiments of ill, and when the messenger arrived he at once set out to return, accompanied by Elias, Peter of Catana, Cæsar of Speyer and a few others, taking a vessel bound for Venice. Arriving there, Francis informed himself exactly concerning all that had taken place, and at once convoked a special Chapter General for Michaelmas that year (September 29th, 1220). Great was the joy throughout Italy on the news of his return.

## CHAPTER XIII

### THE IDEAL SIDE-TRACKED

ONE of the first acts of Ugolini had been to enforce the Benedictine Rule upon the Sisterhood, excepting St. Damian, and that only at the earnest protest of Clare herself. Francis sent a word of assurance to Clare, and a fragment of the letter is happily preserved.

"I, Francis, Brother Minor, earnestly desire to follow the life and poverty of Jesus Christ, our high and gracious Lord, and of His holy Mother, and to be loyal and true to the end; and even so I pray and exhort you all ever to keep close to this holy life and poverty, and take good care never to depart from it upon the advice or teaching of anyone whomsoever."

From Venice Francis went to Bologna. One incident stands out in that journey illustrative of his clear and gentle wisdom. He was mounted on an ass, while a brother Leonard of Assisi, followed on foot. With that occasional clairvoyance that he exercised he saw what was passing in his companion's mind. "My family and relations," the latter was thinking, "were of lineage too high to associate with Bernardoni, and yet here am I following his son on foot." Imagine his amazement and discomfiture when Francis hastily dismounted, saying: "Here, take my place; it is not seemly that you follow me on foot, being of noble and powerful lineage." Leonard, conscience-stricken, threw himself at Francis' feet, craving his pardon.

Arriving at Bologna Francis at once took action to restore things as they were. Learning that a building had been erected

called "The House of the Brothers," he commanded the Brothers to leave it, not even excepting the sick who happened to be there.

Ugolini, who was then in the city, explained to Francis, and also stated in public, that the "House of the Brothers" in no wise belonged to the brethren, but, in fact, was his own personal property. Francis could do no more than accept his word and allow the brothers to remain.

The arrival of Francis at Bologna was greeted with great enthusiasm. It is recorded by Thomas of Spalato, archdeacon in the cathedral church of that city:

"I saw St. Francis preaching on the piazza of the Lesser Palace, before almost every man in the city. He spoke with so much wisdom and eloquence that many learned men who were there were filled with admiration at the words of so plain a man. Yet he had not the manner of a preacher; his ways were rather those of conversation. The substance of his discourse bore especially upon the abolition of enmities and the necessity for making peaceful alliances.

"His apparel was poor, his person in no respect imposing, his face not at all handsome; but God gave such great efficacy to his words that he brought back to peace and harmony many nobles whose savage fury had not even stopped short before the shedding of blood. So great a devotion was felt for him that men and women flocked after him, and he esteemed himself happy who succeeded in touching the hem of his garment."

The meeting with Ugolini upon the subject of the House of Bologna began a series of conversations upon the larger subject of the Order. Francis had been somewhat taken aback by the outcome of that episode, and his general action was a little uncertain in consequence.

Ugolini was the well-accredited representative of the Church, and in his person was venerated by Francis. The

latter stood at disadvantage, and for once that respectful humility enjoined by him toward the Church played traitor to his best purpose. The outcome of these conversations was that Francis, finding his position at length untenable, withdrew from the leadership of the Order.

It was the love between these two men made possible so intimate a consideration of the position and needs of the Order, coming to it, as we have seen, from opposite viewpoints. The very recognition of and sympathy with Ugolini's point of view, persuasively expressed, took away the initiative of Francis in his present negative and physically weak condition.

He was no match for the Cardinal in argument. Drawn into an intellectual discussion, his inspiration failed him, his mind became confused. Where Ugolini gained, Francis lost. His sensitive humility and self-depreciation, inclining at times to an almost extravagant self-criticism, his simple frankness in unfolding his own heart and seeking to understand the other viewpoint presented by Ugolini, rendered him an easy victim.

We may only conjecture what took place:

"Father, these changes should never have been allowed in my absence, changes that endanger, if they do not undermine, the Rule."

"Dear son, all my effort has been in benefit of both Church and Order, whose real interests are one. In pursuance of our duty it is right that we should be informed of all that takes place within the precincts of the Order and have insight into the thought and feeling of the brothers as a whole. What has transpired is but the expression of a strong body of opinion within the Order"

"But, my Father, what is done is contrary to our way of life, which is the very stability of the Order."

"Believe me, dear son, the Church has but your good at heart, and that of the Order, and the Holy Father has much love towards you and recognition of your good work. He desires, moreover, that your spiritual activity should have

free scope, believing that springing from obedience as it does, pure from self-seeking as it is, it cannot work in an adverse manner. There are those in council, however, who do not look upon it in that way, but, pointing in other directions, demur at the freedom allowed. Your vow of poverty is criticised as too difficult as things are at present. But there is one subject in especial on which there is a prevailing opinion. It is with regard to the novitiate. The acceptance of poverty may be a proof of good faith, but it does not guarantee continuance therein. A period of probation is deemed necessary as a test of inward strength and purpose."

Francis was too honest not to recognise the validity of the argument, for had he not himself met with the exploiter and the backslider? There were those well typified in the story of the brother who used neither to pray nor to work, but who ate well, whom Francis in the early days had so indignantly dismissed :

"Go your way, brother fly, since you would eat of the labour of your brethren and yourself be idle in the work of God, like the lazy drone which feasts upon the labour and profit of the good bees but itself does nothing."

Ugolini, noticing Francis' feeble condition, took him to Camaldoli, a retreat within the forest of Casentino, near to the Verna mountain. There he would be able, quietly and carefully, to reconsider the whole matter before the Chapter met. Instead of taking prompt and direct action he had allowed his inspiration to be dulled by argument, and postponed the issue. It proved a fatal mistake, which Francis was bitterly to lament, as so poignantly expressed in the writings.

Conferring further together, Ugolini advised Francis to withdraw from the directing control of the Order, while retaining his spiritual authority. Relieved of this burden, he could devote himself more freely to preaching.

The Cardinal continually touched upon the duty of

obedience and humility. Was not the Church his superior, with a right to demand holy obedience? In other words, the Church at this point had seen fit to intervene in the affairs of the Order, and, sensitive on the point of holy obedience, Francis had no alternative but to accept the position. His spirit was agitated, and he could not rest day or night. He recalled a dream that he had had of a little black hen surrounded by so many chicks that she could not gather them under her wings. "I am that hen," he interpreted, "small by stature and by nature black, and the Lord has given me so many sons whom I am not able in my own strength to protect, wherefore it behoveth me to commend them unto Holy Church, that she may govern and protect them."

The Pope was then at Orvieto, a city near at hand, and there Francis came, humbly and with aching heart, to seek an interview. So heavily burdened did he feel, unable to get his thoughts clear, that he stood outside the door, waiting till the Pope should appear. When he came through, Francis made a reverence, and said: "Father, may God give you peace." "May God bless you, my son," he replied. "My lord," Francis then said, "you are ever busy and absorbed in great affairs, and we brothers cannot consult you as we would desire. You have given me many advisers; give me one in your behalf to whom I may specially turn when need arises." "Whom would you wish that I give you, my son?" said the Pope. And he answered: "Ugolini, the Bishop of Ostia." And this was granted.

Thus Ugolini became Official Protector of the Order, a position that implied, if it did not definitely spell, control. From this time the fraternity may be classed with other Orders among the institutions of the Church.

Hoping for the best, as painted by Ugolini, Francis was to watch, with eyes of pain, helpless, the diverting of the Order from its original channel. Bowing to what was perhaps inevitable, he was to feel that somehow he had betrayed his



trust, received from Christ Himself. The Rule that was the simple mandate of Christ had been broken.

All matters were now considered from the basis on which they stood before Francis' departure on his eastern mission. While he bowed in obedience to the pressure from the Holy See, upon one point Francis was urgent and insistent. It was that the measure enforcing the Benedictine Rule upon the Sisterhood should be at once rescinded. This was done. On the other hand, the Church insisted upon the obligation of a year's novitiate for all who would enter the Order. The ordinance is dated September 22, 1220.

"Honourous, bishop, servant of the servants of God, to Brother Francis and to the other priors and custodes of the Brothers Minor, greeting and the apostolic benediction.

"In nearly all religious Orders it has been wisely ordained that those who present themselves with the purpose of observing the regular life shall make a trial of it for a certain time, during which they also shall be tested, in order to leave neither place nor pretext for inconsiderate steps. For these reasons we command you by these presents to admit no one to make profession until after one year of novitiate. We forbid that after profession any brother shall leave the Order, or that anyone shall take back again him who has gone out from it. We also forbid any to wear your habit without obedience, lest the purity of your poverty be corrupted. If there be any who disobey, they will be under ecclesiastical censure until repentance.

Having given his obedience, Francis was too sincere to practise it in merely a half measure. It was not long, however, before he felt the blinding constraint of this obedience working contrary to the free spirit of his own genius and conviction, till his conscience to obey was at war with the instinct of his heart. His spontaneity was checked, his glowing impulses thwarted, which hitherto had proved the very life of the Move-

ment. Quelling that inner protest, he said to his fellows with a sigh:

"Hardly is it possible for a Religious to be truly obedient!" And to their surprised question "Why?" he answered sadly: "He must needs be as one dead.

"Take a lifeless body, and put it where you will, it will not resist, nor change its place, nor ask to be removed. If it be exalted on a throne, it regards it not. If clad in purple, it looks doubly pale."

But beyond this obedience, which he now regarded as a sacred obligation, he realised a higher obedience to God in and through the simple action, and it was the break of the one upon the other that tortured him.

From this time, in the very nature of things, Francis could no longer remain at the head of the Order. A radical change had taken place, and it was no longer as it had been at the beginning. It had become too popular. Every day new disciples came thronging in. While his loving spirit still was its magnetic attraction, and in a manner integrated them all, his glowing vision and understanding had not been assimilated by the many. The simple leadership, as of old, was no longer sufficient. An administrator was needed, and he felt that he was in no wise such a person.

On Francis' withdrawal, Peter of Catana, who had been a doctor of law and was a capable administrator (yet a very devoted and loyal brother and one of the first disciples), was nominated controller or vicar of the Order. Francis used the word "minister-general," but that title actually remained with himself till his death, even when the practical control had entirely passed from his hands.

At the Michaelmas Chapter, 1220, Francis, reviewing what had taken place since the preceding Chapter, spoke with deep sadness of the alien spirit that had made these changes possible. Then with a gentle self-effacement he gave his reasons for his personal withdrawal from the leadership.

“From henceforth,” he said to the assembled brothers, “no longer am I your leader, but here is Brother Peter of Catana, whom you and I will all obey.” As he then bent low before him, promising him his personal obedience and submission, many of the friars could not restrain their tears. It seemed to them that they were being made orphans, and of such a father. But Francis arose and, invoking Christ, he said: “Lord, I commend this family to Thee which Thou gavest and committed to my care. Thou knowest I have not sufficient strength to continue, and for that reason confide it to the ministers who will take my place.”

There follows this word in the text: “Let them be held responsible if any brother perish through their negligence or evil example or bitter correction.”

From this time onward, we read, Francis remained a subject unto the day of his death, in every way bearing himself more humbly than any of the others.

The Rule, or Form of Life as it was called, was then considered, many contending, with Ugolini, that it was too simple as it stood, for so large an organisation. That it should be recast was now imperative, and naturally enough all turned to Francis to do this.

## CHAPTER XIV

### THE NEW RULE

THE winter of 1220-1221 was spent by Francis in preparing the new Rule. He sought the assistance of Cæsar of Speyer, by reason of his profound knowledge of Scripture. It seemed to Francis that beyond the mandate of Christ there was little he could add, for it comprised all that was needful for the life of Gospel-perfection. All that he could do was to amplify it. Consequently what he wrote was in the way of counsel upon the religious and spiritual life, and a strong, earnest appeal that the first zeal and consecration might be renewed. A few passages will convey the general purport:

“Let us make in ourselves a sanctuary for Him who is Lord, who urges us always to watch and pray, that we may be found worthy.”

“May God help us to persevere with one accord in the true faith and in penitence, for outside these no one can be saved.”

“Let us with all our heart, thought, strength and mind, with all our vigour and effort, our affection, our inward power, our desire and our will, love the Lord God who has given us all of Himself, and in His love is ever giving of Himself, every day to each one of us.”

“We desire, we wish for nothing else (may nothing else please or have any attraction for us) but our Redeemer and Saviour, who is all goodness, the only true and supreme good, who alone is kind, pious, merciful, gracious, sweet and gentle, who alone is holy, righteous, true and upright,

who alone has compassion, innocence and purity, of whom, by whom and in whom is all the pardon, grace and glory of all the penitents and righteous ones and saints rejoicing in heaven."

"Then let nothing again hinder, separate or retard us, and may we all as long as we live, in every place, at every hour, every day and indeed at all times, humbly and truly and unceasingly believe.

"A brother should esteem himself least among all others. . . . The amount of patience and humility shown in time of difficulty is the measure of the patience and humility that he has."

"Blessed is that servant who rejoices in the good wrought through another as if it were his own."

"Blessed is he who takes reproof meekly, who is not swift to excuse himself, even where he has committed no fault."

"Blessed is he who is found as humble among his inferiors as if he were among his lords."

"Blessed is he who attributes all his good to God."

"Blessed is he who is not set on high of his own will, but only desires to be servant of others, and who is not self-magnified when magnified by others. As a man is before God, that he is, and no more."

"Blessed is he who loves his brother as much when he is sick and useless as when he is well and can be of service to him. And blessed is he who loves his brother as well when he is afar off as when he is by his side; and who would say nothing behind his back that he might not, in love, say before his face."

Altogether the matter was of extraordinary length, including, in all probability, some writings still extant, known as the "Admonitions." They reflect his own troubled spirit, swayed between the desire to be true to obedience and loyal to his

vision. He appears in them to be thinking aloud, trying to square his position. He is seeking with simple humility a valid reason for submitting himself wholly to that obedience, and, as Sabatier says, "never quite succeeding."

"The Lord says in the Gospels: 'He who does not give up all that he has cannot be my disciple. And he who would save his life shall lose it.' One gives up all he possesses and loses his life when he gives himself entirely into the hands of his superior to obey him. . . . And when the inferior sees things which would be better or more useful to his soul than those which the superior commands him, let him offer to God the sacrifice of his will."

One might almost imagine from this that Francis considered obedience to authority as the chief essential of religion, were it not that there follows a proviso as to conscience, giving to conscience the highest place.

"If any of the ministers command a brother anything against our Rule, or against his own soul, the brother is not bound to obey, for that is not true obedience by which fault or sin is committed."

Many and touching are the stories evidencing his spiritual stress at this time.

One day a novice who could read the psalter, though not without difficulty, obtained permission from his vicar to have one. Yet as he was not sure whether Francis would approve, he desired first to obtain his consent. He therefore took advantage of Francis' presence at the monastery where he was, and he said: "Father, it would be a very great solace for me to have a psalter. The vicar has indeed allowed it, but I do not wish it without your knowledge."

Francis replied: "The Emperor Charlemagne, Roland, and Oliver with their Paladins and mighty men, gained their victories through great personal travail. Even so the great martyrs and heroes of religion have lived and died

amid spiritual strife. Alas, there are many who are content to recount the things which others have done. And there are those who think to receive honour by reciting and preaching the works of the saints as if they had done them themselves."

A few days later, when Francis was sitting by the fire, the same novice again spoke to him about the psalter.

"When you have a psalter," Francis answered, "you will then desire a breviary, and when you have a breviary you will sit like a great prelate and say to your brother, 'Bring me the breviary!'"

Then Francis arose with fervour and took some ashes and sprinkled them on the head of the novice, saying: "This is the breviary, this is the breviary." And then he said: "Brother, I also was tempted to have books, till I prayed that God would show me His will in this, and I came upon this word in the Holy Gospel, that 'Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the Kingdom of God, but unto others in parables.'"

Some time now passed. Francis was pacing up and down, near to his cell, at Portiuncula, when the same brother drew near again and spoke about the psalter. And Francis answered: "You must do in this matter what your minister tells you." At these words the novice joyfully departed, but Francis, reflecting on what he had said, suddenly called after him: "Wait a moment, brother, wait for me." And he came up to him and he said: "Turn back with me, my brother, and show me the place where I said you should do in this matter as your minister advises."

When they arrived at that spot, Francis knelt down, and said: "Mea culpa, brother, mea culpa, for whosoever would be a Brother Minor should have nothing except a tunic, as the Rule concedes, and a cord and breeches, and those who are forced by manifest necessity, sandals."\*

\* *Speculum*.

Before the new Chapter met, Francis journeyed to Rome with the manuscript he had written for Ugolini's supervision. The alteration and curtailment made by the Cardinal underwent still further revision, and modification at this Chapter and subsequent ones, so that Francis' personal contribution may be said to have been lost, as, in a more literal sense, is affirmed in the *Speculum*.

Alas, it was not long before his sensitive spirit witnessed the shipwreck of his ideal: the very principles for which he stood being subverted and overturned, he helpless to intervene, his hands tied by obedience. It was his agony of spirit that broke down his physical body.

At first he conceived of obedience to Christ through the Church, till he saw it overruled by the higher mandate of loyalty to Christ apart from the Church.

Two or three years later, we read that a German friar, who possibly was Cæsar of Speyer himself, sought the advice of Francis on the question of obedience, after which he said: "I ask you *this* favour, that if the brothers ever come to live no longer according to the Rule, you will permit me to separate myself from them, alone or with a few others, to observe it in its completeness." At these words Francis felt a great joy. "Know," said he, "that Christ as well as I authorise what you have just been asking?" and laying hands upon him he added, "Thou art a priest for ever, after the order of Melchisedec."

And to Leo, who had been lamenting the new spirit in the Order, he wrote, after verbally encouraging him to hold to the Rule in its original purity, and so that no doubt might remain in the mind of his disciple:

"Brother Leo, your brother Francis wishes you peace and health. I reply: 'Yes, my son, as a mother to her child. This word sums up all we said while walking, as well as all my counsels. It you need to come to me for counsel, it is



my wish that you should do so. Whatever be the manner in which you think you may best please God, follow it and live in poverty. Do this and God will bless you. It is my will that you should do this. And if it is needful for your soul's good or consolation, to come to see me, or even if you just desire it, then, my Leo, come!"

Leo at this time seems to have become his almost constant companion, to some extent acting as his scribe or secretary. He was deeply attached to Francis, whom he followed with a passionate loyalty. And from the endearing terms which Francis uses, we realise what a consolation he afforded. He was indeed, we read, of a singular purity and simplicity.

The following story from the *Fioretti* would belong to this period :

The two were wending homewards to St. Mary of the Angels, one winter's day, from Perugia, the weather being bitterly cold, when, after being silent awhile, Francis called to Leo, who was walking a little in front, and said to him : "Brother Leo, even though the Brothers Minor everywhere were to be regarded as perfect examples of the religious life, write this down, and take heed of it, that not there is perfect joy."

When they went a little further, he again called : "Brother Leo, were the Brothers Minor to perform great works of healing, making the blind to see, the deaf to hear, the lame to walk, and to cast out devils; or even to raise up those who would have been dead four days, write down that not there would be perfect joy."

Again going on a little he called : "Brother Leo, were a Brother to possess every manner of knowledge, so that he could prophesy and reveal not only things to come, but also the hidden secrets of the soul and conscience, write that not there would be perfect joy."

Yet a little further he called : "Brother Leo, little sheep

of God, were a Brother to speak with the tongue of angels, and knew the courses of the stars, and the virtue of every plant and herb; were the hidden treasures of the earth revealed to him, so that he knew all the qualities of the birds of the air, and the fishes of the sea, of all the animals, and of man; and of trees, and stones, and roots, and springs of water, write that not there is perfect joy to be found."

A little further still he called: "Brother Leo, were a Brother to preach so that he were able to convert all infidels to the faith of Christ, write that not even there is perfect joy."

And thus they continued for full two miles, till Leo, wondering greatly, at length said: "Father, prithee in God's name tell me then where perfect joy is to be found?"

Then Francis answered: "When we come to St. Mary of the Angels, cold and wet through and mud bespattered and very hungry, and we knock gently at the door, and the porter comes out angrily, saying: 'Who are you?' and we answer: 'We are two of your brothers'; but he replies: 'No, that is not so, but you are two rascals who go about deceiving people, and stealing the alms of the poor; therefore, begone!' And so saying, he slams the door in our face, and we have to remain outside in the cold and in the rain till the night comes on. Then, if we patiently and without disquietude, or inward murmuring, bear this cruel treatment and rebuff—yes, if with charity towards him in our heart, we humbly believe that the porter indeed must know us truly, and that it is God makes him speak thus, O Brother Leo, write it down that there is perfect joy."

"And if we continue knocking, and he comes out furious against us, and with blows and hard words drives us away, calling us thieves and knaves, saying 'get you gone to the alms-house, for here you will have neither food nor lodging.' If with patient, glad, and loving hearts we bear these things, write, Brother Leo, that here is perfect joy."

"And if when it is night, constrained by hunger and cold, we knock again, and pray with weeping that for the love of God he will open the door and let us in, and he, yet more enraged will say: 'These are surely importunate rogues; I will give them their deserts,' and he comes out with a heavy cudgel, takes us by our hoods, and throws us on the ground, and rolls us in the snow, beating us unmercifully. If we endure these things patiently, and with gladness, thinking of the pains of the blessed Christ, and how it behoveth us to suffer for love of Him, O Brother Leo, write that here and in this is perfect joy."

"Now listen, brother, to the conclusion of the whole matter. Above all graces and gifts of the Spirit is that of overcoming oneself, and willingly for love of Him to suffer pain and discomfort and reviling, for in no other gifts save these may we glory. For they are from God. But in the cross of affliction we may exult, for that is ours alone, and therefore, as St. Paul writes: "I would not that any should glory save in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Poverty, humility, the Cross, drew together in meaning. It was the hardest lesson. There were few disciples able to go to that innermost centre with him, where lay the cross of experience, and for Francis, solitary and lonely, the stigmata. His meditation upon holy poverty became at length a contemplation upon the Cross of Christ, which shouted aloud the eternal fact of the poverty of God, who, reserving nothing unto Himself, poured forth all the richness of His Love unto our human salvation and well-being. The Cross spelt the absolute word of the Love of God. And in its mystery the message comes home to us how we, through His poverty, might be rich.

Through the Cross, eternally true, wells forth the life-stream of perfect love into the heart of our humanity, whereby, in man, the life of God ascends unto His own perfection and divinity.

## CHAPTER XV

### THE THIRD ORDER, OR TERTIARIES

UGOLINI took advantage of his visit to Rome again to draw Francis and Dominic together. The Cardinal's voice was not merely all-powerful in the Church at this time, but also in the Empire. He wished to bring about a reformation of the Church, and he saw in the two Orders a means at hand for doing this. But, as we have seen, his policy of filling benefices with brothers of the two Orders was not viewed with approval by either of the founders. In the end it was carried out, though not while Francis lived.

Peter of Catana, who did not long hold his position, for he died in March, 1221, was succeeded by Brother Elias.

There was a large assembly of brothers at the Whitsuntide Chapter, and much enthusiasm. The one anxious heart was that of Francis, who bore his burden alone. But, as became a Brother Minor, he put aside his anxiety as he mingled with his fellows.

A mission to Germany was determined, under the leadership of Cæsar of Speyer, who flung himself into the work with such passion and zeal that within eighteen months he had established Franciscan centres in the great towns of southern Germany, from whence the teaching radiated into all the country round. His evangel succeeded beyond all expectation.

It was probably during this Chapter, for the document is dated 1221, that the Third Order, or Tertiaries, was definitely established. A special name given to these was "fishers for the souls of men," implying the ardour that would "seek through the highways and byways and compel people to come

in" to the kingdom, the new society. It was an association open to all classes and conditions of life: a fraternity of concord and peace.

The appeal of Francis even from the beginning was not merely to the young and unmarried who were able to join the Brotherhood and Sisterhood, but went out to everyone. And as it went out to all, the response came from all. Among the many followers outside the Order a few come readily before our special notice; for instance, the Lady Giacoma and Count Orlando of Chiusi, the nobleman who presented Mount Alvernia to Francis for the use of the brothers. The eager service of the people, bringing food and gifts whenever the brothers assembled together in Chapter, showed that there were earnest hearts beating with the same pulse outside the Order as within.

"Whoever," writes Sabatier, "was free at heart from all material servitude, and who lived without hoarding; the rich willing to labour with their hands and distribute loyally all that they did not consume to the common fund, which Francis called the Lord's Table; the poor willing to work without gain, being free according to the measure of their need to resort to this Table of the Lord—such always were true Franciscans."

We realise, therefore, that the Third Order, or Tertiaries, was spiritually in being before it took on a name. It began with the first man or woman who, unable to join the immediate fellowship, yet received the word gladly, and sought to live in accordance with it. And thus we see a wider circle of men and women, eagerly receptive to the message, expanding around the brotherhood. So great at times was the response to the preaching of Francis that it is recorded how at one place all the people desired to follow him. "Make not ill haste," he said, "to leave your homes; but stay where you are, and I will show you what to do for the salvation of your souls." Thus the problem came before him which led to the definite founding or establishing of the Third Order.

The problem of the married person with social responsibilities must have come before him again and again. And it could not fail to call forth his earnest thought and action. We see how he faces it in an early epistle or manifesto, in which he urges people everywhere to a more earnest Christian life.

“Since the Divine Word offered Himself on the Cross a sacrifice for us, it shows our Father’s loving will and desire for our salvation. Let us then receive Him with purity of heart, and of mind and body too.

“Blessed are they who love the Lord, even as the Scriptures teach: ‘Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and thy neighbour as thyself.’ If any feel he cannot love his neighbour as himself, he can at least refrain from evil, and seek to do him good. And let those in authority endeavour to exercise judgment with mercy, even as they would wish to obtain mercy.

“Let us show charity and humility in all our relationships, and in kindness give alms. In these ways the soul is made clean and pure.

“Let us daily endeavour to abstain from sin and vice, and from excess in food and drink.

“Let us reverence the clergy, not for what they are, but because of their office and sacred ministry.

“Let us bring forth fruits worthy of penitence, and let us love one another, and be kind, and thoughtful, and forgiving.

“So let us persevere to the end, that the Spirit of the Lord may rest upon us, and make in us His dwelling-place, that we may be children of the Heavenly Father, whose work we do.”

These are but a few passages, freely rendered, from a lengthy document. It ends with this benediction:

“They who receive these things, and do them, and commend them to others by example, may the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit bless them.”

Thus he provided a rule of conduct for those who, while they could not take the vows of the fraternity, were yet of one heart and mind with it.

Little groupings of these penitents took place in different parts. One such was in Florence. They built a hospital, and with what loving compassion, we read, did they minister to the sick and the feeble, and especially to the poor.

Francis' message began as a call to repentance, for this must always precede the proclamation of the good news of the kingdom. Hence those who responded became known as penitents. The brothers, too, at first were called penitents, till they became more widely known as "the little Brothers," or Friars Minor. The Third Order thus was known as the "Order of Penitents," the name for those who could not join in the more active service of the fraternity. Nevertheless, theirs was a service equally necessary. For them, too, there has been a turn over of values. Their mental attitude to life has undergone a revolution. It has become a stewardship. What they hold, they no longer hold as their own, but in service.

This, indeed, was the bedrock principle of the Tertiary Movement. The witness of the penitents was to be mainly at home, fulfilling their duties as before, only in a new way. Stewardship was equivalent for them to poverty, in its spiritual meaning.

There is a beautiful prayer attributed to St. Francis truly expressive of this realisation and of the life of the perfect penitent.

"Lord, make me an instrument of Thy peace :  
where there is hate, that I may bring love;  
where there is offence, that I may bring pardon;  
where there is discord, that I may bring union;  
where there is error, that I may bring truth;  
where there is doubt, that I may bring faith;  
where there is despair, that I may bring hope;

where there is darkness, that I may bring light;  
where there is sadness, that I may bring joy!

“O Master,

Make us not to seek so much  
to be consoled, as to console;  
to be understood, as to understand;  
to be loved, as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive,  
it is in self-forgetting that we find,  
it is in pardoning that one is pardoned,  
it is in dying that we wake to eternal life.”

There is no more beautiful example of a Tertiary than Saint Elizabeth of Hungary, in whose life this prayer was truly exemplified. For, though born in purple, she on her husband's death surrendered her royalty in order that she might give herself in service to the poor, living like them in a simple way, and working with her hands.

There is a sweet legend which tells how her husband, shrewdly knowing that she was carrying bread to the poor, raised her mantle one day gently, but to his surprise found beautiful red and white roses into which the loaves had been miraculously changed. How she loved and served the poor came to the ears of Francis, and he wrote to her encouragingly. And he sent a gift of his own mantle, feeling that in it he was expressing the gratitude of all the poor. It was a gift she ever afterwards treasured.

“That same sweet charity,” writes Father Cuthbert, “lies like a golden haze upon the stories of the first Franciscan penitents.”

The life of the Tertiary is very attractively depicted in the story of St. Luchesio.

He was a native of Tuscany, but left the little city where he dwelt for political reasons and established himself at Poggio Bonsi, near to Siena, where he traded in grain. He



became very rich, and at one time seems to have made a corner in wheat, buying up all there was and selling it in a time of scarcity, making an enormous profit. But, converted by Francis' preaching, he took himself to task, so that his manner of living completely changed. He distributed most of his substance to the poor, merely retaining his house with a garden of four acres, and one ass.

He now devoted himself to the cultivation of his piece of ground, using his home as a hostelry for the poor and unfortunate. Not merely did he welcome them, but actually sought them out, sometimes returning with one sick man on his ass and another upon his own back. If at any time his means failed him that he could not feed his guests, he would take a wallet and go from door to door asking alms, though this was not often necessary, as his poor guests were happy in sharing with him in his simplicity. They were made glad in the richness of his poverty, forgetting their own destitution.

We read, too, how his wife, whom people named Buona Donna, meaning "the gracious lady," was his great comfort and inspiration, sharing with him in all these things.

The Third Order was a uniquely Franciscan creation, and thus it retained more closely than either of the others the tradition of the mind and spirit of Francis. And, indeed, what was it other than the simple Christian life in daily practice?

"Lord, let me be a helper of those who are in need of friendship and protection.

"Where there is unkindness, let me bring love and understanding.

"Where there is injury and suffering, let me bring healing.

"Where there is despair and loneliness, let me bring hope and friendship.

"May each one of us do something each day to bring joy and happiness into the lives of others."

The Tertiaries were forbidden to carry arms; they were to abstain from taking any solemn oath, save by absolute constraint; they were to live simply and distribute of their surplus to the poor, and to contribute yearly a "denier" in money towards a sustentation fund for the relief of any destitute brother or sister of penitence. They were to do their duty gladly, to perform all things as unto Christ, to close their hearts to all hatred and uncharitableness.

The initiation of this Third Order drew an immediate protest from the nobility, who, anxious to preserve their feudal rights, sought to check it at its birth. But soon the new Franciscan spirit began to prove its strength. The Tertiaries resisted their demands, seeking the protection of the Church. And this was afforded at length by Ugolini, as Gregory IX, who took them under his special care, instructing the bishops to "allow no one to molest the Tertiaries." And we read that of all the several shocks which finally broke the power of the feudal system, few have struck deeper than this single sentence of the Pope.

## CHAPTER XVI

### THE GETHSEMANE OF FRANCIS

**D**URING the two years following the Chapter of 1221 the very absence of information concerning Francis indicates how little part he had in the changes which then took place within the Order. He had, in fact, withdrawn to one of the remote hermitages beloved of the first Franciscans. In hermitages close by he found Giles, Bernard, Silvester and others of the early disciples, who with himself were out of sympathy with the new movement in the Order.

Poor Francis! his very worst fears were being realised. Privileges were being lavished upon the Order, and its freedom was passing away. And he, at least in part, was responsible! He spent long sleepless nights in agony of prayer.

A vision of longing arose in his mind of what might have been a beautiful home and a tranquil life, a serving God amid simple ways, just as he had pictured the life of a Tertiary.

One night, in a lonely hermitage, this vision pressed upon him with such temptation that, though he strove against it, he could not put it aside. He disciplined himself with his girdle until the blood came. In vain it was. Everything by contrast conspired to make it attractive. It was midwinter, his body was cold, his spirit was lonely.

Outside lay a heavy fall of snow. He stripped himself of his garments and rushed outside, and with great vigour made a number of snow images. "Now see," he said aloud, "here is your wife, and behind her are two sons and two daughters, with a man-servant and a maid-servant carrying the baggage," which last little bit of realism, in fact, took away all the desire, and the temptation left him, once and for all.

“Almost everything that was done in the Order after 1221,” writes Sabatier, “was done either without his knowledge or against his will.”

Ugolini’s policy was pressed forward in the permission to erect churches, implied in the bull of March 22nd, 1222.

“We accord to you permission to celebrate the sacraments in times of interdict in your churches, if you come to have any.”

Not many years, indeed, were now to pass before the Franciscans and Dominicans had practically supplanted the parochial clergy. Francis, as we have seen, wished his *friars* to remain lay-preachers, working solely in the manner of Jesus, and not competing with the clergy.

There is a letter by him still extant, directed to the brothers of Bologna, who had forsaken the way of simplicity. The date is 1222. Against his known will they were forming a college for the teaching of theology. The letter was couched in terms of such dark warning that it was believed that he predicted a terrible earthquake that devastated the north of Italy in the December of that year.

The following passage from Celano shows how intense was Francis’ feeling:

“Lord Jesus, thou didst choose thy apostles to the number of twelve, and though one of them did betray thee, the others, remaining united to thee, preached thy holy Gospel, filled with one and the same inspiration. Once again, remembering the former days, thou hast now raised up the religion of the brothers in order to uphold faith, so that by them the mystery of the Gospel may be accomplished. But who will take their place if instead of fulfilling their mission and being shining examples for all they are seen to give themselves up to works of darkness?

“May they be accurst by thee, Lord, and by all the court of heaven, and by me, thy poor and unworthy servant, who

by their bad example would overturn and destroy all that thou didst do in the beginning and continuest to do by the holy brothers of this Order."

It was an outburst of pain. For he was on the rack of anguish, which would have been more than he could bear, had it not been for the consolation which came through prayer.\*

"The time will come," he mourned, "when our Order will so have lost all good renown that its members will be ashamed to show themselves by daylight."

Francis did not disapprove of learning that was truth-seeking, if he did decry much of the sciolistic teaching of his day. He knew that the living realisation of the Gospel-teaching was itself the answer to and fulfilment of all learning, and that to turn to learning was for the friars to step aside from their richer life of loving service.

"Suppose," said Francis, "you had learning and subtility enough to know all things, that you were acquainted with all languages, the courses of the stars and all the rest, what is there in that to be proud of? A single demon knows more on these subjects than all the men of this world put together, but there is one thing which the devil is unable to do, and which is man's glory: it is to be faithful to God!"

The desire for this learning was in itself an indication of the failure of the vision of Love.

Francis dreamt of the fulfilment of the message of Jesus, of peace and good-will, through the victory of Love. It would be as the splendour of the dawn. For Love itself is the consummation, and learning is but an effort towards that which is fulfilled in Love.

\* On one such occasion it was as if Christ spake in him. "Answer me, simple one, who was it planted the Religion of the brothers, you or I? Do you think I will forsake what I have wrought?" Francis was greatly comforted.

The Chapters 1222-1223 were devoted to the consideration of Francis's draft\* of the new Rule. It was in the nature of a compromise, to effect the reconciliation of the two opposing elements in the Order.

Francis had no part whatever in the discussions, having, as we have seen, withdrawn into temporary solitude. He was unspeakably saddened by the knowledge that, with the sanction of the trusted Elias, several of the provincial ministers were questioning and freely criticising those very elements of the Rule which he regarded as sacred and beyond all discussion. He did not realise that they were but voicing the suggestions of Ugolini in behalf of the Church. The result was that it nearly ceased to be Franciscan. Finally it was submitted to Ugolini, and duly became sanctioned by the Pope (on November 25th, 1223), as the established Rule.†

The movement thus became welded into the organisation of the Church as a recognised institution of that body. It was no longer free in the manner of the early days, when they acted in all things under the glad impulse of the spirit. The Rule of 1210 was the mandate of Christ: that of 1223 was that of the Church. The one proclaimed the call of Christ to his disciples, the other was in the nature of a legal contract of specified service for a particular reward.

Francis, as under obedience, journeys to Rome to receive the Pope's blessing upon the Order. For a time he is guest of Cardinal Ugolini.

In the narrative we see how urgent is his personal witness to the ideal which seemed to be fast slipping away. We see Francis no longer indeed directing the Movement, but striving in all things to be the perfect example of what the Brother Minor should be, so that in this way, and through his constant prayer, he might yet retrieve the soul of the Order.

"Yes," he cried prophetically, "it will be: in the latter days the Order will be as at the beginning, and greater, and

\* Known as the Rule of 1221.

† Known as the Rule of 1223.

the vision will be realised, but first there will be a great tribulation."

And it was revealed to him by Christ concerning the tribulation when no one will wear the habit except in the woods. And when the world loses faith there will not remain any other light except that of the Order, "which I have placed for a light to the world."

And Francis said: "On what shall my brethren live, if they dwell in the woods?"

Then Christ made known that they should be fed as the children of Israel, with manna, because they will be like them; and then they shall return to the first state in which the Order was founded and begun.

Befriended by the cardinals, meeting courtesy with courtesy, he yet could not rest in their palaces, but felt as if in prison, "from which it needed demons to cast him out." He gasped for the free air and the simple life of his native hills in the companionship of his Lady Poverty.

But he found solace and refreshment in the friendship of one of kindred spirit, who loved his message and practised it. Around the Lady Giacoma there gathers one of the loveliest idylls of the Franciscan legend. Her compassion was awakened, for her womanly sympathy at once detected his loneliness of spirit. She ministered to him in sickness with a sweet attentiveness. Once she made some little sweetmeats of her own for him to eat. As she offered of them to him we can imagine her saying with a smile: "Is not this, too, the Lord's table?" And in the same spirit he accepted of them.

One day he brought her a little lamb, which became her inseparable companion. "It will make you think of the Lamb of God," he said gently. "And also of Brother Francis, his own little disciple," she replied. "Yes," he answered, smiling sadly, "for I, too, am God's little lamb. He bore the Cross for the world's redemption. I am in travail for the Order of

Brothers Minor." He called her in his loving way, "Brother Giacomina."

When he bade her farewell she said: "Brother, let me know when you need me and I surely come," and he promised again to see her.

It was with something of his old joy that he made the return journey, gladly leaving behind the artificial surroundings of the great city.

Christmas was close at hand, and a desire took great hold on him. "Oh, that it were possible to adore with the shepherds and the magi of old, and worship at the cradle of the little one of Bethlehem!" Then the definite idea came and grew upon him to make its vivid representation. Having arrived at the Vale of Rieti, he determined to sojourn there for a while. One day he expressed his wish to a knight, Giovanni of Greccio, who at once eagerly undertook to make the necessary preparations. When the project was known, the people were enthused, and gave what assistance they could. It was to be at a little hermitage close to Greccio.

On Christmas Eve, as the hours drew on, the people might have been seen coming from every quarter, with glad and eager steps, torches in their hands, the woods and hills resounding with their carols.

Francis' prayer was fulfilled, for the scene had indeed become real to him. Imaginatively he was in Bethlehem. With moist eyes he gazed upon the stable where was an ox and an ass, and upon the straw, the little bambino with its mother close by. His heart knelt there in wonder and adoration.

At the service of matins, Francis, as deacon, read the Gospel in a voice so fervent and gentle that all hearts were touched.

Then, as he preached, his own deep feeling and imagination took hold of his listeners, and it was as if they were living again in Bethlehem, adoring with the shepherds. His emotion, the earnest words falling from his lips, were but the outward sign of the still more perfect offering of himself. He was



renewing his compact with Christ. He would make a richer witness, treading more nearly in the footsteps of Jesus.

"Be thou found in me," was still his prayer, only in a closer, more intimate way, that Christ's example might in him be visible to the brethren.

He would take up his cross anew to follow in His steps who said: "I am the way." Thus, while his spirit was tortured and wounded by what was being done in his name but without his consent, it knit him more closely unto the life of his Lord.

Again and again an inward tension drove him into retirement for prayer and contemplation. So he spent Easter meditating during the Lenten season upon the sacred drama, realising its application in his own life. He offered his life as a gift to God, as a cup to be drained for the welfare of the Order. So he would prepare himself for an absolute self-offering, that Love might be vindicated in him.

He was present at the Whitsuntide Chapter, 1224, the last he attended. A copy of the new Rule was given to each of the Ministers. At this Chapter the mission to England was determined.\*

Everywhere was activity and enthusiasm, and the movement, to all appearance, was prospering on every hand. Francis alone knew how things were tending, and his foreboding proved infallibly correct.

Following on the Chapter, he for a short time resumed his preaching, but in August made his way toward the Verna, the mountain presented by Orlando of Chiusi. The pressure of his own passion for the life of the Order drove him to the solitude where alone with God he might celebrate the festival, greatly observed at that time, of St. Michael the archangel

\* Brother Thomas of Eccleston has recorded that: "In the eighth year of the lord, King Henry, son of John, on the Tuesday after the feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin, which that year fell upon a Sunday, the Friars Minor first arrived in England, landing at Dover."

and the heavenly host. The festival began on the day of Assumption and ended on the day of Michaelmas.

Francis was accompanied by seven of his old companions, including Masseo, Leo and Angelo, Masseo being given charge of the little band to spare Francis all unnecessary cares.

The first night they lodged in one of the little hermitages of the brethren. The second night, owing to the inclement weather, they were forced to take refuge and spend the night in a "deserted and dismantled" church. While his companions slept Francis kept vigil through the long night hours in troubled prayer. The feeling of emptiness in the place, void as it had been of worship for many years, and therefore haunted by demons, as he, in common with the general belief, imagined, preyed upon him. He felt the emptiness steal into his own heart, and for a time his woes returned more intense than they had been, and it was as if he was being buffeted to and fro by the demons.

"If the brothers only knew what I suffer," he felt, "with what pity and compassion would they be moved." With the dawn came peace, for he suddenly looked upon the Passion of Christ, "and it was as if he saw it with his own eyes." And he understood in a new way because of his own experience.

In the morning, as he was too weak and exhausted to go far on foot, the brothers begged an ass of a poor peasant, who, learning that it was for Brother Francis of Assisi, said that he would lend it very willingly and would lead it himself.

When they had gone a little way he said: "Is it true that you are Brother Francis of Assisi?"

"Yes," answered Francis.

"Well," said the peasant, "try then to be as good as all folk regard you, for many have great faith in you, and see to it that none may be disappointed."

Hearing these words, Francis, so the narrative runs, thinking no scorn to be admonished by a peasant, did not say

within himself: "What boor is this who thus speaks to me?" as many would nowadays that wear the cowl; but straightway dismounted and thanked him lovingly and warmly for so speaking.

When about half way up the mountain, the heat being very great and the ascent weary, the peasant became very thirsty and exhausted, and bitterly began to complain.

Francis knelt down and remained long with heart uplifted, till he felt his prayer was answered. Then he pointed with his finger to a rock hard by, and they all saw a spring of water bubbling through, whereat the peasant drank his fill and was comforted. "And," adds the writer, "neither before nor after has water been found in that place for a great space around."

The Verna is the most prominent peak of a belt of hills that encompass the little paradise of the Casentino, a lovely district drained by the upper waters of the Arno. Among the peaks it stands quite unique, for at the summit is an enormous mass of basaltic rock, "looking like a petrified Noah's Ark on the summit of Mount Ararat." Arriving there, they paused in contemplation of the beauty around. In the clear light Francis looked upon a panorama filled for him with rich and touching memories. The loveliness of it was like the vesture of Lady Poverty. The altitude was not too great for it to seem remote, but just big enough to bring all close and near in a round embrace of love.

The little forest was rare and unique—primeval, as it still is to this day. It is full of a wild life, protected from all marauders and curiously fearless to the presence of man. The little party, even as they entered, were greeted with boisterous welcome. The birds came flocking about them with songs of joy. They came especially close to Francis, and soon had alighted upon his head and shoulders and arms. "I see," he said, "that it is pleasing to our Lord Jesus that we are come

here, since our little brothers and sisters, the birds, show such delight at our presence."

Here was beauty and fragrance indeed to give a background to the quiet for which he longed. He sat on a little knoll and gave instructions as the brothers quickly raised a booth of leaves and twigs for their dwelling. He told them of the premonition he had of his approaching death and of the sadness he felt that it should be so when his work as yet was scarcely begun.

Orlando, hearing of their arrival, came to welcome them, bringing provisions and offering his services, and at Francis' request caused a little hut of boughs to be made at the foot of a great beech about a stone's throw from his companions.

After Francis had blessed them, Orlando and his servants prepared to depart, but first he drew Francis and his companions aside. "My brothers," he said; "I do not wish you to suffer any hardship while in this place, lest it prevent your full attention upon spiritual things. I wish you therefore to send to me for whatever you need—and, indeed, I shall feel hurt if you do otherwise.

After they had left and Francis and his companions had sat down, he spoke to them concerning the spiritual life, and among other things he said: "Do not take too much notice of this kind offer of Orlando, lest you in any way offend Holy Poverty—our Lady and Madonna. For be sure that if we despise poverty, the world will despise us; and the more we do so, the more shall we be in want. But if we cleave to holy poverty with a close embrace, the whole world will follow after us and will abundantly provide for us.

"God has called us to this holy Order for the salvation of the world, that, providing a good true example, we may declare God's purpose—and the world will make provision for our needs. Let us then persevere in holy poverty, for it is the way unto perfection and an earnest and pledge of the heavenly riches!"

"This," he said, "is the manner of life which I lay upon myself and upon you."

Then he gave them his blessing and went to his cell under the beech tree.

"It was the will of God," we read in the *Fioretti*, "that the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ should be renewed in his soul through love and pity, and in his body through the imprinting of the most holy stigmata."

We realise how passionately he was pressing back in thought and vision to the first wonderful days.

"From that time," the narrative continues, "he gave himself to unceasing prayer." It was a prayer of anguish rising to an acuteness of suffering on behalf of the Order. And the poignancy of it was in the feeling that he had failed his Lord.

## CHAPTER XVII

### THE STIGMATA

SO terribly distressed was Francis concerning the future of the Order, that the legend declares that an angel came to comfort him. Disturbed by his companions' curiosity, he retired still further into the woods.

His own travail for the Order gave intensity to his contemplation on the sufferings of Christ, till the two became one, and he was suffering with Christ.

In meditating on that divine love, perfect unto the end, his heart broke with pain in the feeling of his own failure and inadequacy, till he was carried right out of himself, becoming one with what he felt, till he knew naught save that passion into which he entered through the near door of his experience. His days were divided between meditation and passionate prayer, in the intensity of which sometimes his very body was lifted visibly from the ground. So absorbed was he that he was forgetful of the hours. But a falcon, building her nest close to his cell, woke him every night a little before matins, with her calling and the beating of her wings against the cell, and ceased not till he rose up to say matins: but when he was more than usually wearied the falcon would sound her call later. And so Francis had great joy of this clock, for the watchfulness of the falcon kept away all idleness, but beyond this she would come and sit quite tamely by him.

As the day of the Elevation of the Cross drew on, his fervour "waxed exceeding great in the contemplation of the Passion of Christ and his infinite love, that he was altogether transformed into Jesu through love and pity." "My God and my all: my God and my all," he repeated in his heart again

and again. How deep was his communion, and yet how utter his self-abasement. "Who art Thou, my God? and who am I, a vile worm and Thy useless servant." He passed the night in prayer, and with the dawn of light upon the hills there came to him an experience of realisation that is supreme in the life of man. It has been called the beatific vision. Only in weak human words can it be told—words which veil the unutterable. We read that he beheld one like unto a seraph, with six wings resplendent and aflame, which with swift and instant flight came toward and drew nigh to him, and he saw that he bore the image of a man crucified. Overcome by the dazzling splendour, he swooned in ecstasy, beholding the Ineffable. When the vision passed he became conscious of sharp throbbing pains, and to his amazement and confusion, for he sought not to make it known, he found upon his body the imprint of the stigmata of Christ. It was the seal of Christ's acceptance of his offering.

The stigmata of Francis is one of the best authenticated of facts.\*

The vision was psychologically in accordance with his contemplation, which was at the time of the Festival of the seraph archangel Michael, captain of the heavenly host, and of the Elevation of the Cross.

The experience ended Francis' vigil.

The day following Michaelmas he commenced his return journey. As he was too exhausted to walk, at request Count Orlando placed a horse at his disposal.

They set out in the early morning, slowly and reverently, Francis watchful and intent upon the scene made holy with God's Presence, where he had touched the inner mystery of divine love. Then, before it finally passed from view, he knelt down and with hands outstretched blessed the place:

\* This was the first experience of the kind that has been recorded. It seemed so remarkable and of so unique interest that it was testified to by numerous witnesses.

"Adieu, thou montain of God; adieu, thou sacred hill!  
The blessing of the Father, Son, and Spirit be with thee!  
In God's peace abide. I will see thee no more. Adieu,  
adieu!"

When they descended into the valley Francis became so absorbed in contemplative thought as to be oblivious to his surroundings. They took a circuitous route, neither the easiest nor the shortest, but one which seemed to linger among the hills. They passed through numerous villages studding the upper valley of the Tiber, but so wrapt in spirit was he that he did not notice the eager welcome with which he was received.

At Borgo San Sepulcro, close to which was the Franciscan monastery of Monte Casale, where he was to rest for a few days, he had a particularly eager reception.

As he approached this place, we read, crowds came to meet him, and many walked before him with olive branches in their hands and crying: "*Il Santo!*" ("Behold the Saint!"), and many, in their devotion, pressed near to touch him. But he, his mind raised in contemplation and rapt in God, knew nothing of what was done and said around him. . . .

After having passed through the town, and a full mile beyond, returning to himself, he said inquiringly: "When shall we be coming near to the town?"

Several miracles are recorded of this journey. The first was the healing of a demented friar at Monte Casale. Another was the healing of a child suffering with dropsy. Francis prayed over the child, then laid his hands on the child's body, and straightway the swelling was allayed and he was made every whit whole.

The day following their arrival at Monte Casale Francis sent two of the brothers back with Orlando's horse.

In one of the villages through which they had passed a woman lay at death's door through being unable to give birth



to her child. Hearing that the saint would be coming that way, her relatives thought that if he but laid his hands upon her she would be healed. To their dismay they found that he had already passed beyond the village and was now too far distant to be overtaken. They were, however, greatly cheered when news came that he was returning. But, alas, it was only the brothers returning with the horse. They knew not what to do, till one thought of the bridle Francis held as he rode. They carried it to the woman, laid it gently on her body, and she gave birth to the child without any pain. This instance of healing, curiously well attested, shows the loving faith of the common people in Francis.

A few days later he resumed his journey with Leo as his companion. At Citta di Castello he healed a woman suffering from a frightful hysteria.

He remained a month in that district, ministering to the people.

It was winter when he again set forth. A peasant now guided them, lending Francis his ass. But bad weather and difficult roads now hindered their progress, and ere night fell a blizzard came on and they had to find what shelter they could. They spent the long night hours in vigil within a shallow cave, the snow drifting in upon them.

In this plight the peasant, unable to sleep owing to the cold, began to lament and to murmur against Francis. But he responded with a word of such cheer, and so loving a touch of the hand, that the man's courage returned. And with it there came a glow and warmth that he quite forgot his discomfort and fell asleep, and from his own account he slept more peacefully amid the snow and rocks than ever he did upon his own bed.\*

The next day Francis reached Portiuncula, to set off again almost at once on a preaching tour in southern Umbria. He threw himself into the work with an abandon of love and a

\* *Fioretti*.

consuming zeal. The people thronged about him, eager for the touch of his hand and his personal kindly word. He would not pause for rest, but, mounted on an ass, for he was too feeble to go on foot, he would sometimes evangelise as many as three or four villages in one day. Elias accompanied him and, noticing his great weakness, could not help being anxious for his friend. He besought him to rest awhile, but Francis, his spirit towering over his infirmity in the passion of self-surrender, heeded not his warning. Knowing "by revelation" that his end was near, he agonised to make of the remaining days a self-immolation that would be absolute, and therefore redemptive in its efficacy. "It is the seed that falling into the ground, and dying, bears much fruit."

But, alas, that palpable simple witness unto the common people whom he loved so well, and which was Christ's charge to him, was to be denied. He had not spared "brother Body"; he had treated it with a rigour and denial of its adequate nourishment, which, with the incessant toil to which it was put, so strenuous and unceasing, could only end in physical collapse.

"How many and how great necessities he denied his body that he might give a good example to his brethren, and that they might more patiently bear their needs, we who were with him can neither by word nor by writing set forth." \*

He was suddenly stricken with partial blindness, and Elias had to lead him gently back. His ceaseless labour aggravated a trouble contracted while in Syria, an eye-complaint, which apparently became more acute from the time of his mystic experience on the Mount of Verna.

Elias communicated with Ugolini, and together they tried to persuade Francis to go to Rieti, where the papal court then was, owing to trouble in Rome. Among the Pope's retinue were several physicians of renown. Francis, however, declined. If

\* *Speculum*.

it was God's will he would find healing without recourse to physicians.

Their continued argument and entreaty, "under obedience," overbore his reluctance, and he consented, stipulating, however, that he should first rest a few days at St. Damian, where the sick were nursed under Clare's gentle supervision. He longed for the comfort she alone could give.

He scarcely had arrived there, however, before his trouble became gravely worse, and for some weeks his sight failed entirely. With it there came also a descent of spiritual darkness so great that, unusual to him, his soul burst into complaint, and the one-time joyous heart was for a season wrapt in gloom; so much so that several of the brothers, misreading, thought he was tempted of the devil.

All at once the prospect he had dwelt upon of redeeming the great error had fallen to the ground, and he was rendered helpless and ineffective. The personal witness and testimony he had hoped to make in order to win back the Order into its rightful channel was checked. He was powerless to fulfil the last service of which he dreamed, and now his work abruptly ended without that vindication. A floodtide of early memories swept in upon him. Every part of this little sanctuary was sacred to his early days. Here he had made the great surrender. Here his mission began with a charge direct from Christ. All came vividly before him, and now in anguish broke upon his heart. The beginning so bright and full of promise! and now all so dark in a twofold sense, and the beautiful ideal, as it seemed to him, farther off than ever!

We see that earnest, eager spirit, forced to inaction, dwelling upon the past and the rich possibility of what might have been, taking upon himself the whole blame: "*Mea culpa, mea culpa!*" We see him brooding over the future; the agony in no wise for himself, but for his children and for the Order. But mostly it is because of the Kingdom of God, and the possibility that had seemed so bright of the ushering in of the

age of Spirit with its new and gracious society that he had seen in his ardent vision, of brothers coming from all directions, running in their eagerness from countries far and near, to enter in through the beautiful gate of Poverty—all now passing as a dream, falling into the distance once more, far off as ever. Alas, the Order was no longer a society, a brotherhood rich in its own life, prescient of the age of Spirit, and finding in this its full meaning! It was now merely an institution of the Church, an organisation, but no society; a preaching body working in a prescribed way, no longer original in its free life and service.

He did not think at all of himself: he thought of the broken ideal, of God's will thwarted through his weakness, which state of mind is very clearly reflected in the narrative.

The remembrance of his spiritual experience bred in him the deeper pain.

Clare alone understood, and while tending him with gentle ministry she would not intrude upon his woe. With tactful wisdom and patience she set herself to win back the Francis she had first known.

She had a little hermitage made for him in the convent garden, where he might enjoy a full freedom, yet close enough for her to be at hand. Gently and lovingly was he carried there.\* At first he was troubled with the little field rats and mice which ran about his bed and disturbed his slumbers, but he got used to it. It brought back to him the life that he loved and the presence of Lady Poverty. The little discomfort, too, helped in the rich suggestion. And then that tension of spirit relaxed.

During the night a sweetness fell upon him, and he heard a voice saying: "If thou hadst faith but as a grain of mustard seed, thou wouldst say to this mountain: 'Be thou removed

\* By the brothers who were with him, probably Angelo, Masseo, Leo and Ruffino. The early happy intercourse still was possible at St. Damian.

hence,' and it would remove." It was the mountain of depression that had come over him, which it seemed that he of his own power could not banish. And he replied eagerly: "Be it, Lord, according to Thy word," and immediately he was freed. The consciousness of the Presence came full upon him.

His spirit revived, and song once more burst from his lips. Light had broken through his darkness. And then, oh joy! he found his sight had returned.

It was but a few days later that, seated with Clare at the monastery table under the olive trees, sharing in the common meal, Francis fell into an ecstasy, and literally his face shone. Coming to himself he cried: "The Lord's name be praised!"

He had composed his famous canticle in praise of all living creatures. Its full authenticity, as we have it, has been questioned, and it is possible that it is but the distant echo of that holy inspiration recognised as the highest expression of his rich poetic spirit. Nevertheless, the song that has come down to us, whoever might have been the first copyist, is not wanting in beauty and delight.

The following is a free rendering of this hymn of praise:

Most high, omnipotent, good Lord!  
To Thee be praise, honour, glory, benediction,  
For to Thee alone do these belong,  
And none is worthy even to name Thy name.

Praise to my Lord for all His creatures,  
And first of all to blessed Brother Sun,  
Who makes the day for us, and gives us light,  
And is resplendent, beautiful and bright;  
Yea, is the image of Thy glory, Lord.

And praise for Sister Moon, and for the stars  
Which Thou hast set in heaven, so clear and fair,  
For Brother Wind, and rain and the sweet air,  
The blue sky sparkling, every kind of weather;  
And that Thou givest to Thy children food.

Praise to my Lord for Sister, flowing Water,  
So manifold in use, humble, precious, pure;  
And be Thou praised, my Lord, for Brother Fire,  
Who brings us light to cheer our hearts by night;  
And is so beautiful, and jovial, and strong.

Praise for our Sister, Lord, dear Mother Earth,  
Who bears and nurtures and provides for us  
With many kinds of fruit, the sweet grass and the  
flowers.

Bless my Lord, praise Him, every one!  
Every creature, everywhere,  
Him in gratitude obey,  
Lovingly, adoringly!

He composed a melody for it, and taught his companions to recite it and to sing it.

"His spirit was then in great consolation and sweetness," we read. The old eagerness returned, and he wished at once to send for Brother Pacifico, who, before he became a brother, had been a poet and a great singer. And he desired that some of the brothers with good voices be chosen to go with him, both to preach and sing. First they should preach, and then, in the manner of minstrels, sing the Hymn of Praise. And afterwards the preacher would say to the people: "We are the minstrels of the Lord, and for our service we wish to be paid. And our payment is that you remain in true penitence."

And he said: "For what are the servants of the Lord but His minstrels who should raise the hearts of men and lift them to spiritual joy." And this he used to say specially of the Friars Minor, who were given to the people of God for their welfare.

It is indeed his own evangel expressed in beautiful verse, for it tells of God's sweet presence breathing everywhere.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### THE BREAKING OF "BROTHER BODY"

**I**T was not till September that Francis left St. Damian for Rieti. The news of his coming quickly went before him, and people flocked to meet him. Wishing to avoid the demonstration, he found refuge in the little church of St. Fabian, now called "Our Lady of the Forest," a mile or so out of the town.

. . . The people of the city, coming to know where he was, hurried out to see him, and many entering the vineyard of the church took of the grapes. The priest, realising that his grapes were all being taken, was sore dismayed, and began to repent that he had given Francis hospitality.

Francis, discerning his feeling, said: "Father, how many measures of wine does the vineyard yield at its best?"

"Thirteen measures," answered the priest.

"Then," said Francis, "be not disturbed, but have faith in God and in my word, and if in the vintage you have less than twenty measures of wine I will cause it to be made up to you."

His words consoled the priest, and it happened that in the vintage he received full twenty measures of wine. And "we who were with him bear testimony that his word was fulfilled to the letter." \*

At Rieti he stayed for a while at the Bishop's palace, where he was medically treated. But when the ordinary methods were proved ineffective and cauterisation was decided upon, at his own request he was taken to the hermitage of Monte Colombo, which was close by.

\* *Speculum.*

The method to be tried was to draw a rod of white-hot iron from the ear to the eyebrow, which barbarous treatment, combined with blood-letting, was curiously believed in at that and even later times.

His spirit for a moment failed him when he looked upon the burning brazier with the cruel instruments. Then turning to the fire, making the sign of the cross over it, he said with a touch of rapture which came upon him :

“Brother Fire, you are noble and useful beyond all creatures: be kindly to me in this hour. I have loved thee for the love of Him who created thee. Show, then, thyself courteous to me to-day.”

The brothers had not the courage to remain in the room. When the operation was over, and they returned, he said to them: “O cowardly ones, why did you go away? I felt no pain. Brother doctor, if it is necessary you may do it again.”

It was, however, no more successful than the other methods. Plasters, salves, further cauterisation, blood-letting, were resorted to: it was all in vain, and served but to increase his suffering. He was, therefore, brought back to Rieti, where he remained for a time.

While there, we read that one day he had the craving to hear a little music.

Calling a brother who had been skilful with the guitar, he asked him to play a little. But the friar feared that it might cause scandal, and Francis did not press his wish. God, however, took pity on him, and that very night sent an angel who played to him music such as he had never heard on earth, hearing which, he lost all bodily feeling. “At one moment he said it was so sweet and penetrating that if the angel had given but one more stroke to his bow his soul would have left his body.”

The music proved more beneficial than all the remedies of the physicians, for his health now improved very considerably, and during the winter of 1225-1226 he went among the little



hermitages that he loved, teaching the brothers and preparing himself again to resume his preaching.

He went to Poggio Buscone for the Christmas festival. People flocked there in crowds to see the dying saint, with superstitious wonder and curiosity, as Francis realised to his chagrin. He tried to disillusion them.

"Do not be too sure of your saint," said he. "You come here expecting to find a great saint. What do you think of this? I am going to confess to you that I ate as usual all through Advent!"

There are many instances of his absolute sincerity in the little things as well as in the greater.

One day, in the extreme cold, a brother brought a foxskin with which to line Francis' tunic. Francis accepted it very gladly, but on condition that it be sewn upon the outside, so that all might see.

In the course of a brief ministry he passed through Siena, where an incident took place not a little reminiscent of one in the life of Jesus, where the simple wisdom of the spirit in Francis as in his Master was triumphant over theological casuistry designed to trip him.

One day a certain doctor of the Order of Preachers came up to him and, after talking awhile, inquired of him concerning a passage in Ezekiel: "If thou speakest not to warn the wicked from his wicked ways, his blood will I require at thine hand." "For," he said, "I know many, good Father, who are in mortal sin to whom I do not speak to warn them of their impiety. Will their souls, therefore, be required at my hands?"

But Francis humbly answered that he was a simpleton, and had rather be taught of him than answer concerning the meaning of Scripture.

Then the master of learning said: "Brother, though I have heard this text expounded by many, I would like to know your interpretation of it."

Therefore Francis said: "If the text is to be understood in a general way, I take it to mean that the servant of God should so burn and shine forth with the love of God that by the light of his example and of his holy conversation he should reprove all the impious. The beauty and fragrance of his life is its own unceasing witness."

His ministry in the early spring, every little incident of which takes on miraculous colouring, ended in so grave a physical collapse that it was feared his end had come. From the time of his mystical experience on the Verna he had been troubled with severe hæmorrhages in the breast and side, where the wounds of the stigmata were the greatest. Whenever his body suffered any tension they bled copiously. At this time so great was the loss of blood that he suffered extreme prostration.

Elias hastened to him with assistance. When he arrived Francis had improved sufficiently to be able to return with him. A sudden turn for the worse, however, brought a temporary halt.

The people of Assisi, hearing of his grave condition, sent men-at-arms to protect him and facilitate his return, "fearing lest he should die there, and that others should have his most holy body."

We read how the soldiers went into the village of Balciano seeking to buy provisions, but in vain, and how, returning discomfited, they said to Francis: "You, Brother, must give us of your alms, since we can get nothing to eat."

Francis turned on them with some vehemence: "The reason of your non-success," he said, "is that you confide in your fly-gods and pence, and not in God. But return now, and put aside your shame, and ask alms for the love of God, and they shall give to you abundantly."

The soldiers followed his advice, and it happened just as he had said, and they returned with joy.

He was wont to say that the servant of God ought more

willingly and joyfully seek alms for the love of God than he who out of his own bounty and courtesy should go among the poor, saying: "Whoever will give to me a coin worth one single penny, I will give him one thousand marks of gold. "For the servant of God, when seeking an alms, offers the love of God to those from whom he begs, in comparison with which reward all things which are in heaven and earth are nothing."

"On all occasions," we read, "he would praise and uphold the dignity of Lady Poverty."

His arrival in Assisi was met with a great demonstration of joy.

In the thirteenth century, for a city to acquire the body of a saint was deemed the greatest of good fortune. It possessed a magical potency, conveying healing to the sick and prosperity to the people.

Poor Francis! to think that he who held no possessions should find himself held and claimed as a possession by the people of Assisi. In his last days he was to all intents a prisoner. He was housed in the Bishop's palace, men-at-arms on sentry without lest he should be stolen.

He was there three months, "not consenting to die." The feeling of constraint, the knowledge that there were men stationed outside waiting to convey the tidings of his death to an almost impatiently eager people—for a dead saint would perform more prodigies than a live one—saddened him unspeakably. The news, also, of the doings of the Order that daily came, the disloyalty to Lady Poverty, and the confidences of the brothers, who unwittingly aggravated his trouble by their own sad forebodings, filled his cup of grief to overflowing. "*Mea culpa, mea culpa,*" throbbed in his heart.

"We who were with him when he wrote the Rule and well-nigh all his other writings bear testimony that he wrote also many things for the good of the Order wherein certain

of the friars (notably our prelates and learned folk) were against him, for that they seemed to them burdensome and not to be borne, not knowing then what things should come to pass in the Order after his death. And because he greatly feared scandal he would not strive with them, but suffered unwillingly their will." \*

"Woe to these brothers," he said, "who go contrary to that I know to be God's will in this matter." But that the word of God given to him "might not return empty, he sought to fulfil it in himself . . . and in the end his spirit found rest herein and was consoled."

In his fever he would rise in his bed crying :

"Where are they who have ravished my sheep? Where are they who have stolen my family? If I could go once more to the Chapter General I would show them what my will is!"

His old companions, Leo, Angelo, Masseo and Ruffino had been chosen to be with him.

One of them said: "Father, you are leaving us; point out to us, if you know him, the one to whom you might safely confide the burden of the generalship." Francis therefore dictated the following letter :

"To the reverend Father in Christ, X——, Minister-General of the Order of the Brothers Minor.

"May God bless you, and keep you in His holy love.

"Patience in all things and everywhere—this, my brother, is what I specially recommend. Even if they oppose you, if they strike you, you should be grateful to them, and desire that it should be thus and not otherwise. In this will be manifest your love for God and for me, His servant and yours; that there should not be a single brother in the world who, having sinned as much as one can sin, and coming before you, shall go away without having received your pardon.

\* *Speculum*.

"And if he does not ask it, then do you ask it for him, whether he wills or not.

"And if he should return a thousand times before you, love him still more than yourself, so that you may lead him to well-doing.

"Have pity always on these brothers." \*

The Minister-General was to be the most humble, the most loving, of all the brethren.

He also dictated a letter to all the brothers, desiring that it should be read at each Chapter General and serve to keep the ideal before them.

He sought to convey his own living sense of the active presence of Christ.

"God offers himself to us as to His children. That is why I beg of you, all of you, my brethren, kissing your feet, and with all the love of which I am capable, to have all possible respect for the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.

"Contemplate, my brothers, this humility of God, and let your hearts expand in gratitude before Him; then humble yourselves that you, even you, may be raised by Him.

"Hold nothing as your own, that He may receive you unreservedly, even as He has given of Himself unreservedly."

He also dictated a letter to all Christians. In it he beseeches those in authority to temper justice with mercy, and that those who have chosen a religious vocation live in greater simplicity than other Christians, loving their enemies, doing good in return for ill, taking up the cross of self-denial. "And no monk," he adds, "is bound to obedience if in obeying he would be obliged to commit a fault or a sin."

"Let us not be wise and learned according to the flesh, but simple, humble and pure. . . . We should never desire to be above others, but rather to be below and to obey all men."

\* His successor was thus to have but one single weapon — an unalterable love.

Aware how disquieted she was over his condition, he wrote to Clare, promising again to visit St. Damian, adding a word of advice for the sisters to avoid a too great asceticism. He ended the letter with a little laud of praise which he himself had set to music.

As it was his first public action, so was it Francis' last one, to bring peace to his native city. He was at this time deeply distressed by the knowledge that there were serious dissensions in the city between Bishop Guido and the Podesta, the governor chosen by the people. A long-smouldering feud had burst into flame. The Bishop, for some personal slight, had excommunicated the Podesta, who had retaliated by forbidding anyone to have monetary dealings with the clergy. Feeling rose very high, for neither party seemed disposed to make peace. But what neither would attempt it befel Francis to do. One of his chief desires was to see a united Italy, abiding in concord and peace, a condition not easily achieved when the cities were not merely often at war with one another, but also not infrequently at war within themselves.

The solution must be spiritual if it would be lasting. It was as poet-minstrel, the troubadour of Christ, that Francis wrought the miracle. He added a new verse to his canticle of praise.

Praise to my Lord, for those who can forgive  
And pardon injuries for Thy love's sake,  
And those who bear infirmity and pain,  
Yet in their suffering hold their hearts in peace,  
For Thou shalt crown them, O my Lord Most High!

He then called one of the brothers, and said: "Go to the Podesta and request him from me to assemble with his fellow magistrates in the square of the Bishop's palace; for it is a shameful thing that the Bishop and the Podesta should hate one another so, and no one concern himself with their peace."

He came out of respect for Francis, whom he greatly loved.

When they had all gathered together in the open court, and the Bishop had also come, two of the brothers stepped forward, and one of them said: "Brother Francis has made a hymn of praise to God for all His creatures, and requests that you will listen very devoutly while we sing it"—and they began to sing the canticle of praise, including the new verse which Francis had added.

The Podesta listened intently with very great devotion and even with tears.

When the praises were finished he said before them all: "In truth I say that not alone my Lord the Bishop, whom I wish and ought to have for my Lord, but if anyone had slain my blood-friend or my son I would forgive him"; and so saying he threw himself at the feet of the Bishop and said to him: "Behold, I am ready to make satisfaction for everything as it shall please you, for the love of our Lord Jesus Christ and of his servant Francis."

But the Bishop, taking him with his hands, raised him and said: "My office bids me be humble, yet because I am naturally prone to wrath, it rather is needful that you should pardon me."

And they embraced and kissed each other.

And this reconciliation was held by all to be a very great miracle. . . .

"But we who were with the blessed father bear testimony that when he said of anyone: 'Thus it is,' or 'Thus it will be,' always it happened thus just to the letter. And we have witnessed this so often that it would take long to write or to tell it." \*

His own peace had returned rich and in full measure now that he had brought peace to his fellow citizens of Assisi.

\* *Speculum*.

## CHAPTER XIX

### THE PASSING OF THE SAINT

FROM this time, after a slight recovery, the weakness of Francis increased, so that he had almost given up hope of seeing his beloved Portiuncula and St. Damian again.

The thought of the "Chapel of the Little Portion" was constantly in his mind. "Never abandon Portiuncula," he said again and again. "It is holy; it is God's house."

It seemed to him that it was the standing witness to the ideal of the first illumination and of the great days which followed.

Asked to describe the perfect Brother, he laughingly but gently selected the sterling qualities of each, avoiding any invidious choice.

"He would be a good brother who should have the faith of Brother Bernard, which he had most perfectly, with the love of poverty; the simplicity and purity of Brother Leo, who was truly of the holiest purity; the courtesy of Brother Angelo, who was the first knight who came to the Order, and who was adorned with all courtesy and gentleness; the gracious and natural good sense, with the fair and devout eloquence, of Brother Masseo; the mind raised in contemplation, which Brother Giles had in the highest perfection; the virtuous and continual labour of holy Rufinus, who without intermission prayed always, for even when sleeping or doing anything his mind was always with the Lord; the patience of Brother Juniper, who arrived at the perfect state of patience through the sense of his own unworthiness; and the solicitude of Brother Lucido, who would not abide in any place longer than needful lest he might be too content, saying: 'We have no dwelling-place here, but in heaven.'"



Three months had passed since Francis was brought to the Bishop's palace, and now it was late summer.

There was every indication that his end was near, and he gave his blessing to the brothers standing around.

"Adieu, my children: remain, all of you, in the fear of God; abide always united to Christ; great trials are in store for you, and tribulations draw near. But blessed are they who persevere in the way in which they began, for there will be scandals and divisions among you. As for me, I am going to my Lord and my God. I have assurance that I am going to Him whom I have served."

A physician came from Arezzo to visit him.

"Brother doctor," said Francis, "how much longer do you think that I have now to live?"

"Brother, it will be well with thee by the grace of God," he answered.

Francis gave a little merry laugh. "Do you think I am a cuckoo to be afraid of death?" he said. "By the grace of the Holy Spirit I am equally content to live or to die."

Then the physician said openly: "Father, according to our medicine craft your infirmity is incurable, and I believe you will die toward the end of the month (September)."

Then Francis, lying on his bed, stretched wide his hands, and with great devotion, reverence and rapture, said: "Welcome, my Sister Death!" Straightway he began to sing songs of praise, and he called to him Brothers Leo and Angelo to sing to him of Sister Death. And so they sang with great emotion and with tears in their eyes his Hymn of Praise. And when they came to the end he added a verse in praise of death.

Praise to my Lord indeed for Sister Death,  
The death of the body that none may avoid.

Alas for all who die in mortal sin!  
But blessed they who enter in Thy will,  
The second death to them can work no ill.

At all times, by day and even during the night, his praises resounded, and when his own voice was tired he would get Leo or Angelo to continue.

Elias, thinking it was not quite seemly that a saint should die in this fashion, and, fearing that it might cause scandal (for Bishop Guido had left the palace, partly, it may be, in protest), remonstrated a little: "Should he not be thinking of death rather than singing?" But Francis brushed aside his objections: "Was it not well that he should rejoice in the Lord?"

And, happily, it brought about the fulfilment of his last desire, that he should be taken to Portiuncula. Very gently the brothers bore him there.

When they came to the Hospice, which is in the midst of the way by which one goes from Assisi to St. Mary, we read that he bade his bearers lay the bed down on the ground. And though on account of his long and very great disease of the eyes he was not able to see it, he made his bed be turned so that he should hold his face towards Assisi. And raising himself a little he blessed the city.

His last days were perfectly radiant. "He went to meet death singing," Celano writes. The fact of being again at the little Portiuncula, to breathe its freedom once more, hear the wind in the trees, feel the quiet of the woods, hear the wood-notes of his little sisters the birds, was a consolation ineffable. So many gracious memories were attached to the place.

From this time he enjoyed an unbroken peace. He became free from all pain in that last rally of life which so often

precedes death. His mind was lucid, his thought revealingly clear.

He took the opportunity to dictate his final Will, in which we have his last clear word, his earnest thought and command. In it he recapitulates his spiritual experience; in it he seeks to perpetuate his living witness.

“After that the Lord gave me brethren; no one showed me what to do, but the Lord revealed to me that I should live in the manner of the holy Gospel. I caused this to be written down simply and in few words, and this the Pope confirmed to me. And they who came to take up this life gave up all they had to the poor, were content with a single tunic, patched inside and out (if they so desired), together with a girdle and breeches, and we desired to have nothing more . . . were simple folk and subject to all.

“I myself used to work with my hands, and still would do so, and it is my will that all the brothers work at some honourable trade, and that those who have none should learn one, not for wages, but for the sake of a good example and to flee idleness. And if a sufficiency should not be given for our work, let us repair to the table of the Lord, seeking alms from door to door. The Lord revealed to me that we should use this greeting: ‘The Lord give you peace.’

“Let the Brothers take care not to receive churches or other buildings except in accordance with the vow of poverty, and let them not reside in them except as strangers and pilgrims.

“I forbid, whatever the cause, the brothers asking for any privilege from the court of Rome. If they are prohibited from one place, let them go to another, thus doing penance under the blessing of God.

“I forbid absolutely, by obedience, clerics or laymen to introduce alterations or glosses in the Rule or in this Will under pretext of explaining it.

“Let those in authority add nothing to and take nothing from these words, and in all Chapters, when the Rule is read, let these words be read also.”

These extracts are sufficient to indicate that in the Will Francis chose the last and best moment to unfurl the banner of liberty which would rally the Brothers once more to the standard of the old ideal. It had precisely that effect, and was immediately responsible for a great division that took place in the Order, but it saved the soul of the Order.

Four years later Ugolini, then Pope Gregory IX, on the ground of his friendship with the saint, in spite of Francis' precaution, himself interpreted the Rule, and declared that the Brothers were not bound to the observance of the Will. Francis' obvious meanings are in places completely glossed over. “One is stupefied,” cried a brave Franciscan, “that words so clear should have need of a commentary. It suffices but to have ordinary sense to understand it. There is one thing that even God cannot do: He cannot make two things that contradict each other bear the same meaning.”

Innumerable privileges were accorded to the brothers by Gregory, in spite of Francis' interdiction. High feelings arose. For his loyalty, Cæsar of Speyer suffered imprisonment and death. Bernard and others of the first companions had to fly for their lives against the bitter persecution which broke out against the strict observers of the Rule. Copies of the Will were confiscated and destroyed.

Francis also left a final message for the Sisters, but it has not come down to us. He commended them very earnestly to the Brothers to be cared for, belonging, as they do, to the same family.”

He then remembered the Lady Giacoma, and he said to a fellow: “I believe it will be a consolation to her if you inform her as to my state. Ask her also to send some burial garments like to ashes in colour, and some of the sweetmeat she made

for me in the city." The Romans called that sweetmeat *mostaccioli*, which is made of almonds and sugar and other things. They wrote, therefore, as he said, but before the messenger started there was a knock, and when the door was opened behold Lady Giacoma, who had come in great haste to visit him, and with her her son and some attendants.

It was not usual for a woman to enter, but the father put aside the rule, seeing that she had come from distant parts out of great devotion, adds the writer.

"Welcome is Brother Giacoma!" said Francis.

She entered with tears in her eyes. And we read that she brought with her the very things he had desired: a shroud cloth (that is, of ashen colour) for a tunic, and some of the sweetmeat, as well as other things. He was so calm and joyful that at first she could hardly believe that he was dying.

"Dear Father," said one of the Brothers, "deprived of your presence we will be orphans indeed. Think then of all your children, and forgive us all our faults."

"God has called me," he answered, "and I must depart. But most earnestly I forgive my brothers, present and absent, every offence and every fault; and I absolve them each one according to my power."

Placing his right hand on the head of each, he blessed them all, present and absent, and those who should come into the Order up to the end of time; he was grieved that he could not see all his brethren.

He gave a peculiar blessing to Bernard of Quintaville. "I desire," he said, "whosoever shall be Minister-General, to love and honour him as myself; let the Provincials and all the Brothers act toward him as toward me."

Then he asked for bread to be brought in, and in his presence it was broken into portions. Then, taking it, he gave a portion to each of the brothers, and they ate it together in

token of unity and love one to another, even as Jesus at the Last Supper broke bread with His disciples.

He wished to end his life as he had begun, with that same symbolic action as when he first gave himself into the embrace of the love of God and of Lady Poverty. It was his last clear testimony to the brothers. He caused himself to be laid naked on the ground, and, covering with his right hand the wound that was on his left side that it might not be seen, he said to the assembled brothers: "I have tried to do my duty: may Christ teach you yours."

The warden hastily arose, and with true inspiration took the garments brought by Lady Giacomina, and said: "Know that these are not your own, but have been lent to you." And at these words Francis rejoiced in that he was able to keep true faith to the end with Lady Poverty.

He was carried back upon his bed, and then at his bidding the Brothers chanted the Psalm 142 and sang his own Canticle of Praise, he joining in.

The sun was setting, spreading a mantle of gold around. Nature with soft breathing was falling to rest. All was very still.

One of the brothers read the portion from the Gospel of John, beginning with the passage: "Before the feast of the Passover, Jesus, knowing that his hour had come to go from this world unto the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end."

There was silence, broken only by an occasional sob, the Brothers standing around the dying man, watchful and reverent. His expression became rapt and glowing. He was communing with the Master whom he loved.

Suddenly the quiet was broken by a rapturous music. A great multitude of larks\* flew over the roof of the hut,

\* The crested lark.

alighted a moment, then fluttered in a circle round the roof, and then rose into the sky with loud songs of praise. At that moment his spirit passed, carried upwards on the wings of song.\*

It was the sweetest ending he could have wished, he who was brother to all living things, and not least of all to his little brothers and sisters the birds.

He, too, was poet and singer, his life the richest poem, the melody of which sounds down the ages still so sweetly clear, that all who hear pause to bless the Poverillo of Assisi.

“God sent His singers upon earth  
With songs of sadness and of mirth,  
That they might touch the hearts of men,  
And bring them back to heaven again.”

The day following his death the Assisians took the body to give it a public and triumphant burial. They returned with it via St. Damian, so that the Sisters might join with the Brothers in doing honour to the one they loved.

. . . . .

It is not so much what a man creates, but what he is, that ultimately counts. To-day it is not the Order of Brothers Minor that signifies to us: it is the life of Francis himself. By his own estimate he failed. But he failed as Jesus failed, and for much the same reason. The material at hand proved but an inadequate vehicle for his rich conception.

The work still waits to be done, abiding the coming of those whose hearts are aflame with that same compelling passion of love which he possessed.

\* The brothers stood spellbound around the lifeless body, for with the marks of the stigmata it seemed as if they were gazing on the body of Christ. A radiance seemed to issue from it, and the dark flesh became exceeding white and smooth as a child's, and the eyes clear and luminous.

In a larger count Jesus did not fail, nor did Francis. His influence has not failed. The fragrance of his presence lingers down the ages. His life, which fell "as a stream of tender light across the darkness of his time," glows upon these days, after the rain, as a bow of hope, far off yet strangely near, ever bespeaking the One by whose light he was illumined.

Since the days he trod in Umbria, the carefree follower of Lady Poverty, time has made a circuit of seven hundred years. We are confronted to-day with many apparently insolvable problems. The spirit of Francis speaks to our age as to his own: "The religious and social problems are not separate: they are the same; they are not two, they are one." "My brothers, Rulers, Presidents, Prime Ministers, Leaders of society and of religion, *Majores* and *Minores* of the twentieth century, your little brother Francis kisses your feet, and commends a certain method that he learnt from his Master, a way that leads direct to the New Society, and may prove the happy solvent to all your woe."



## EPILOGUE

The Master said "Well done," as nigh he came,  
The Poverillo of the lowly heart,  
Francis, the least of all, whose simple art  
In love bore fruit the richest in His name!  
"Dear little sheep of God, through whom once more  
The love from heaven shone, for man to see  
Again the vision and the ecstasy!"  
The saint grew sudden pale, and Christ forbore.

"Thou knowest, dear my Lord, the meanest I!  
'Twas but Thy hand didst stretch in charity,"  
Kneeling, he faltered; and then Jesus said,  
"Arise, thou little child; if 'twas My hand,  
*Thou* gav'st the *vessel* for the Wine and Bread,  
Being constant—loyal to My first command."

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